the weekly Standard

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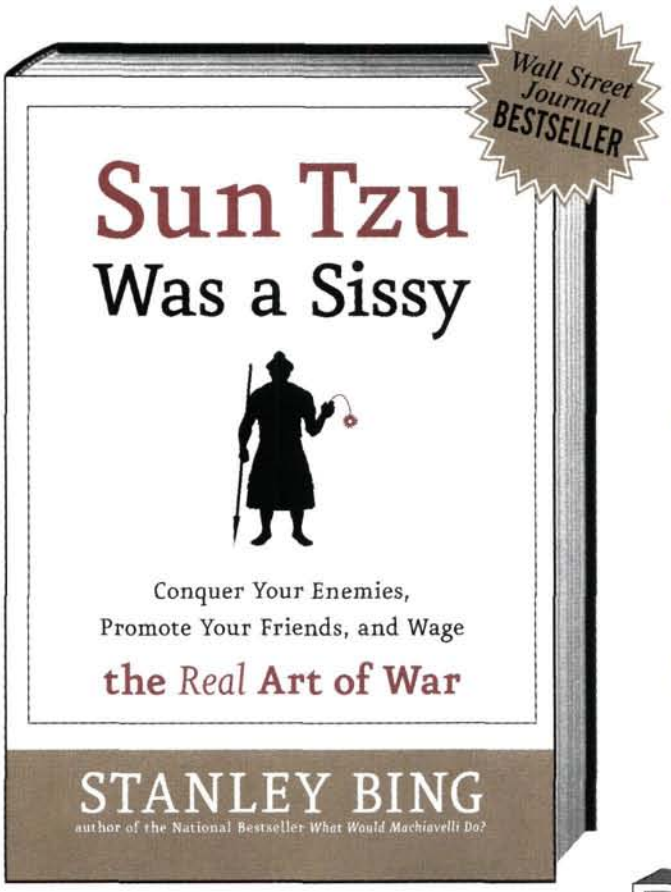

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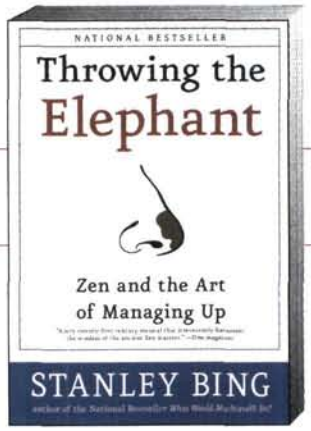

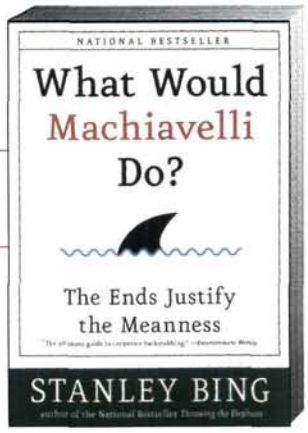

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THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

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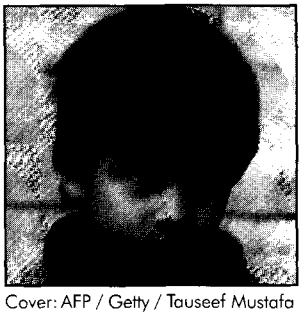

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Ferreting Out the News

Remember how, during last month's gala celebrations at the opening of Bill Clinton's presidential library on the banks of the Arkansas River, Clinton's White House successor, George W. Bush, was overheard musing aloud about a submarine-borne nuclear missile strike on Little Rock?

Yeah, THE SCRAPBOOK missed that story, too. As did every last one of the 1,000-plus professional journalists—THE WEEKLY STANDARD's own Matt Labash included—who were on site to cover the event from start to finish. Go figure.

Go figure, more to the point, how come it took an altogether unprofessional journalist to break the news of President Bush's scandalous remark. For that matter, ask yourself why it is that the altogether unprofessional journalist in question—Sidney Blumenthal, "Washington bureau chief of *Salon*"—remains to this day the only man who's dared to publicize the incident in print. Are we really sunk so low? Has the right-wing assault on America's mainstream media finally succeeded in quashing all dissent?

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Here—from his November 25 column in London's *Guardian* (there being no reputable American newspaper brave enough to publish the man)—is what "two eyewitnesses" told Sidney Blumenthal about President Bush's homicidal daydream:

> At the dedication of the Clinton library last week in Little Rock, Karl Rove and President Bush received separate tours of the dramatic building, a glistening silver, suspended boxcar filled with light and with a panoramic view of the Arkansas River. . . . Bush appeared distracted, and glanced repeatedly at his watch. When he stopped to gaze at the river, where secret service agents were stationed in boats, the guide said: "Usually, you might see some bass fisherman out there." Bush replied: "A submarine could take this place out."

A most unsettling vignette, to be sure. What could Bush have been thinking, asks Blumenthal in the *Guardian*? "Was the president warning of an al Qaeda submarine, sneaking undetected up the Mississippi, through the locks and dams of the Arkansas River, surfacing under the bridge to the 21st century to dispatch the Clinton library?" Or, (b) "was this a projection of menace and messianism, with only Bush grasping the true danger, standing between submerged threat and civilization?" Or, (c) "perhaps it was simply his way of saying he wouldn't build his library near water."

Or, (d) could it be that Sidney Blumenthal, a notoriously malicious fable-spinner, just made the whole thing up?

We report, you decide. ♦

'Breaking News' So to Speak

Wait, back up: It seems there's an option (e). The "two eyewitnesses" Sidney Blumenthal cites as sources for Bush's "nuke Little Rock" reverie may have heard a voice they *thought* was the president's—but was actually being ventriloquized by their own buttocks. No, really. Stranger things have been known to happen. For confirmation of which THE SCRAPBOOK directs doubtful readers to an authority whose reputation for accuracy and integrity far exceeds even Mr. Blumenthal's own. We refer, of course, to the *Weekly World News*, a supermarket tabloid routinely overlooked by the Pulitzer Prize board, but otherwise indistinguishable from the Howell Raines-era *New York Times*.

Were there any real justice in the news business, for example, *Weekly World News* science writer D.G. Bulger would surely win a 2004 Pulitzer for a story he published earlier this year about a 40-year-old Michigan man named Jason Jablonski. "Linguists and proctologists from around the world are stunned by a Detroit man's unique gift," Bulger reported on August 26. Mr. Jablonski "is able to speak fluent French out of his buttocks."

Unlike *Salon*'s Sidney Blumenthal, incidentally, Mr. Bulger disdains anonymous sourcing and blind quotation. His information about Jablonski's rare form of "Intestinal Linguistic Amplification" is plainly attributed to a professional expert, one "Dr. Edith Winters, senior fellow at the California Institute of Bowel Abnormalities." Also unlike Blumenthal, Bulger ends his story on a thankfully upbeat, non-nuclear-holocaust note. It turns out that Jason Jablonski's talking derrière has struck a blow for global comity. The Detroit furniture store he works in "draws many French Canadian customers from across the border, which has allowed his buttocks to sharpen [their] conversational skills." Pleased with these results, Jablonski now hopes to work at the United Nations or as an embassy interpreter in a French speaking country. ♦

Do as the French Do

And in other low-minded news involving French-speaking international diplomacy: France's daily *Le Parisien* revealed on December 20 that one of that country's best-known public magistrates, Pierre Hontang of Bayonne, is now under intensive Justice Ministry scrutiny for his alleged behav-

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ior at the Fifth Conference of European General Prosecutors in Germany this past May. Hontang attended the gathering as keynote speaker for a session on "fundamental principles of ethics for prosecutors." According to a preliminary report by a joint task force of French and German police investigators, however, Hontang also slipped away from the conference at least twice, both times in order to visit a brothel. And while he is thought the first time to have used his own money for what one detective called "activities that are a little shameful for a magistrate of this standing," Hontang's return trip was apparently paid for with a credit card he'd stolen from a German colleague at the prosecutors' conference.

"The affair came to light," according to the *Times* of London, "after M. Hontang complained to the owner of the brothel . . . about the quality of its work. The owner noticed that he had not paid with his own credit card and alerted German police officers."

French justice minister Dominique Perben has asked the country's Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature to suspend M. Hontang pending completion of the inquiry. "It just wasn't something we could ignore," a Conseil spokesman told reporters, "even in France."

That "even in France" part all by itself makes the whole story worthwhile, don't you think? ♦

City of Angels

On Friday, December 17, two copies of Los Angeles County's 47-year-old official seal—the ones hanging on the front wall of its Board of Supervisors hearing room—were quietly covered over with temporary stick-um decals featuring a newly designed logo the county has chosen as a permanent replacement. What will eventually be a $700,000 county-wide reinstallation project got started back in May when the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California sent the Board of Supervisors a formal letter of complaint about the original seal, one minor iconographic element of which was a cross. The old seal was thus unconstitutionally Christian, the organization argued. And the supervisors—by a subsequent series of 3-2 votes—agreed.

Here's the thing, though: By the time the Board of Supervisors got back to work on Monday morning, December 20, the covered-over cross had somehow made itself clearly visible again, right through the stick-um decal's paper fabric. "It's a Christmas miracle," said a spokesman for supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, one of the Board's two replacement-project opponents. Antonovich's colleague, supervisor Don Knabe, agreed: "It is very symbolic that the cross has reappeared on a new seal directly above the new icon of [the San Gabriel] mission, which does not have a cross."

Nah, "I'm pretty sure it's a graphics problem," explained Tom Tindall, a general manager of the county's Internal Services Department. Either way, ACLU spokeswoman Elizabeth Brennan tells the *Los Angeles Daily News* that it's unfortunate the cover-over effort seems to have failed. "But they've made a good-faith effort," at least.

That "good-faith effort" part all by itself makes the whole story worthwhile, don't you think? ♦

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Casual

Do Go Changin'

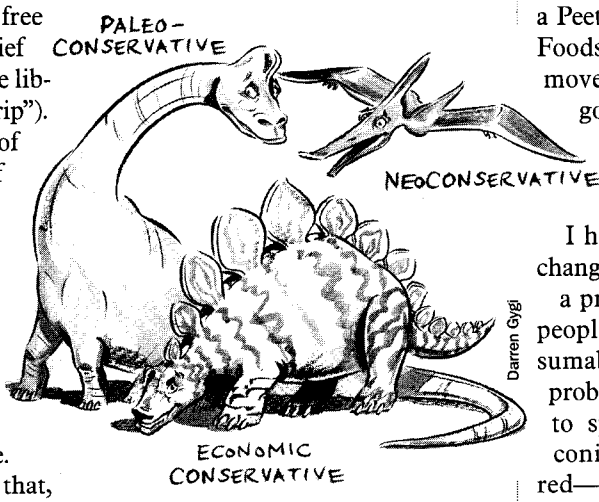
Conservatives come in many stripes and various hues. There are the paleoconservatives (the guys who want to get the cars off the streets but haven't yet found an efficient way to deal with the horse manure once they've done so) and the neoconservatives (those former liberals famously mugged by reality and now, Leo Strauss volumes in hand, intent on world domination) and the economic conservatives (whose belief in free markets is as absolute as the belief of the rest of us in gravity) and the libertarians (whose motto is "let 'er rip").

My own conservatism is one of temperament: I get a kick out of tradition and am usually made edgy by too-rapid change. I don't go as far here as Evelyn Waugh, another conservative of temperament. Waugh once claimed that he was not going to vote Tory because the party had been in office for eight years and hadn't set back the clock a single minute.

The reason I bring this up is that, for a man of conservative temperament, I find myself having a strange reaction to radical change in my own neighborhood. A vast amount of new building, most of it residential, is popping up all around me. A conservative of my kind should be saddened by it; as an aesthetic snob—none of the buildings is particularly handsome—I should also be smugly appalled. I find I'm neither. I like what is going on, and am eager for more of the same.

My neighborhood is downtown Evanston, just outside Chicago, on whose edge I have been living for the past 15 years. A 26-story building has gone up across the street from me. Another building that will take up the better part of a full city block is now under construction less than two blocks away. Smaller buildings—of five or six stories—have been put up nearby. Almost all these buildings are condominiums—the entire neighborhood, like much of urban America, has gone condo-maniacal.

Most of the new owners are younger people. In the building across the street lived a high-scoring guard from the Chicago Bulls (before he was traded). Four or so blocks to the north, a second-year quarterback of the Chicago Bears is said to have bought two apartments and combined them into one.



The prices for these various apartments range from $385,000 to $1.3 million. Couples seem to be the principal buyers: a man and a woman each earning in the low six figures, with perhaps a bit of help from one or the other set of parents. The overall effect is to give the neighborhood a greater feel of vibrancy, more restaurants, more people on the streets, more action generally.

When I was a boy this same neighborhood was dominated by blue-rinse dowagers. The town was then by law as dry as these women—it's still the headquarters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union—which condemned it to dreary restaurants, many of them tea rooms, where you could get chicken-salad sandwiches and a demoralizing little peach cobbler.

In those good/bad old days, people came from the west and farther north to shop in Evanston, which had a number of shops, including a small branch of Marshall Field's. But the building of a large mall a few miles to the west soon left Evanston bereft of most of its useful stores, and fast food joints catering to the Northwestern students began to dominate. The best measure for the quality of a town is the number of blocks of good shops it contains—New York and London win hands-down here—but until recently Evanston couldn't even put together a single block of interesting shops. Soon after the new building began, though, a Peet's coffee-and-tea shop, a Whole Foods supermarket, and a cineplex moved in. With all the building going on, with the continuing influx of young, mildly opulent people, there is hope more will follow.

I hear lots of grumbling about the changing local scene. Parking, already a problem for local merchants and people who come to shop, will presumably become an even greater problem. One of the builders seems to specialize in odd colored balconies—copperish brown, bright red—which much offends the Ruskinians among us.

The entire scene has what a temperamental conservative might call the nauseatingly depressing smell of progress. Yet far from feeling nauseated or depressed, I feel enlivened by the spectacle. Might it be that, unbeknownst even to myself, I have undergone a subtle conversion from a conservative of temperament to a free-market man? (The famous invisible hand of the market has not yet tapped me, awake or in my dreams.) I wish I knew what's going on. All I do know is that, walking in my neighborhood, I now hear myself mutter, the reverse of the "Burn, baby, burn" mantra of the 1960s rioters, a new little mantra of my own: "Build, baby, build."

Joseph Epstein

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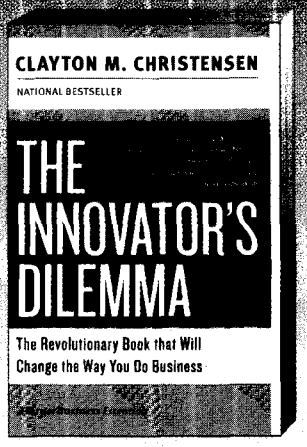

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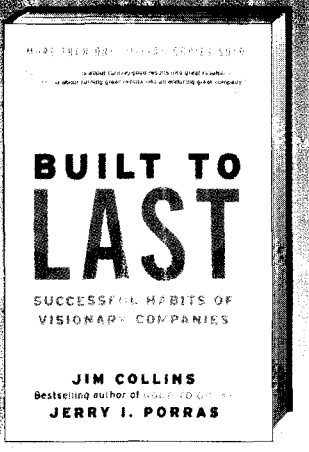

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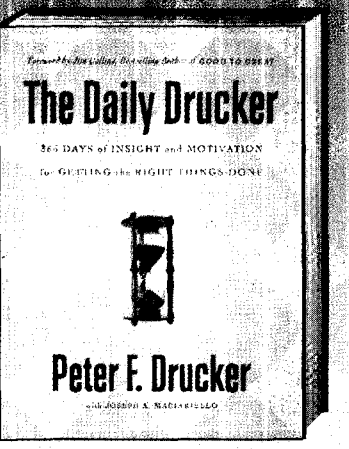

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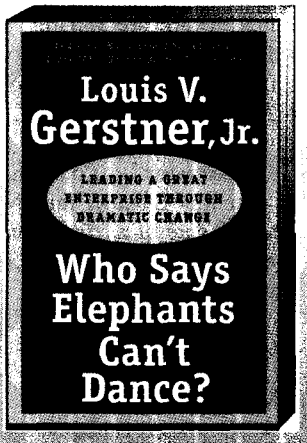

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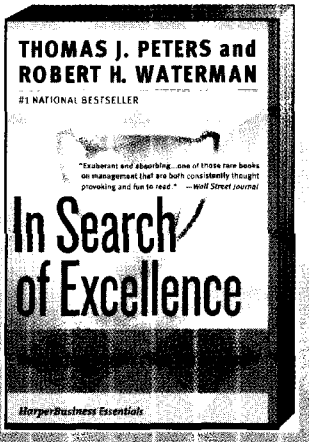

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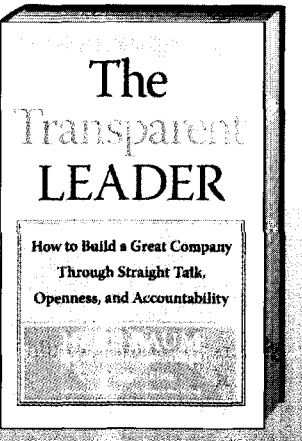

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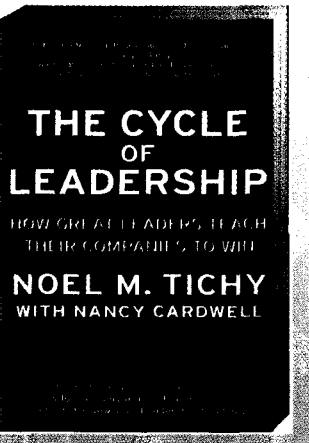

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No Free Lunch

Fred Barnes's article on Social Security ("Republican Insecurity," Dec. 20) misses two basic facts. One, a big cut in benefits is a big cut in benefits. Two, a big cut in benefits will never pass in the current environment.

Liberals know that eventually there will be a crisis, and when there is a crisis (around 2015 or 2020) they will demand a big tax increase and a small benefit cut. They will have scored an ideological victory.

Strategic conservatives know that getting a big (6 percent) personal Social Security Savings Account is the biggest step toward personal freedom and personal responsibility we will take in our lifetime.

They also know Chile's record and the Savings and Loan bailout both proved you could take the transition financing off-budget and then use the improved revenue-to-expenditure process to pay off the bonds over a generation with no burden on the general budget.

The Ryan-Sununu plan has already been scored by the Social Security actuary as having achieved solvency for Social Security.

If Barnes wants to quote someone calling us "free-lunchers," then I would urge him to call our opponents "the suicidal wing." It is impossible for Republicans to propose a big benefit cut and pass it. The effort would lead to a shattering defeat in 2006.

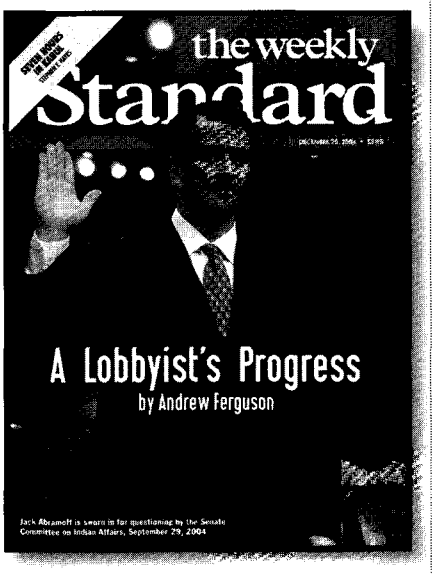
Newt Gingrich
Washington, DC

A Real Filibuster

In Duncan Currie's article about overcoming Democratic filibusters of judicial nominees ("A New Weapon in the Judges' War," Dec. 6), he discusses several "nuclear" options for breaking the impasse. Nowhere, however, have I seen a discussion of using what I would call the "conventional option," the one envisioned by the framers of our Constitution, which would be to make the Democrats conduct a real filibuster.

Up until now, Senate majority leader Bill Frist and company have let the Democrats merely sign a pledge to filibuster a nominee. The nomination is then tabled, the Senate moves on, and the obstructionists get off easy. At no point have the Democrats been forced to make the endless floor speeches to prevent the up-or-down vote. To my knowledge, we have not seen a real filibuster since the civil rights era.

Forcing a real filibuster would accomplish several things. It would clearly paint the Democrats as obstructionists. It could sort moderates such as Bingaman, Conrad, the two Nelsons, Carper, and Dayton out from the pack. And if Frist were to schedule the seven blocked nominees as the first seven votes of the new session, and then force Democrats to filibuster one after the other, future votes on Supreme Court justices, tax reform,



and Social Security reform would go more smoothly.

And besides, if this resulted in the Senate accomplishing nothing for a few months, would we really be worse off?

Dale Johnson
Ashburn, VA

Media Mismatch

Robert J. Barro's "Bias Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" (Dec. 13) evaluates the media in terms of liberal bias. On a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being most liberal and 0 being most conservative, the *Wall Street Journal* ranks highest, with a score of 85. But Barro recognizes that the *Journal*'s editorial page is on the opposite end of the scale:

"The rating for the *Journal*'s editorial pages would of course look very different. (As one quipster observed, James Carville and Mary Matalin probably agree more often than the news and editorial divisions of the *Wall Street Journal*.)"

I have been a *Journal* reader for over 50 years, and frankly, I cannot reconcile this perspective. I find myself fairly consistently in accord with the *Journal*'s editorial page; and yet at the same time, I'm not offended by the news content.

By contrast, I check out the *New York Times* quite regularly. I rarely agree with their editorial policy and am almost always offended by their editorials masquerading as front-page news.

Dick Goldberg
Morrison, CO

Errata

In Christopher Caldwell's "Holland Daze" (Dec. 27), the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was described as occurring "911 days after 9/11." In fact, van Gogh was killed 911 days after the May 2002 murder of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn. Also, the article stated that there are about 3 million foreign-born in the Netherlands. There are roughly 3 million people of non-Dutch ancestry (*allochthonen*) in the Netherlands, of whom about 2 million are foreign-born.

Because of an editing error, a Scrapbook item last week on Louisiana district judge Timothy Ellender mistakenly identified the date of an infamous Halloween party he attended as 1983. The party actually occurred in 2003.

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the weekly Standard

Choosing Sides in Iraq

British prime minister Tony Blair visited Baghdad on December 21. Excerpts from Blair's remarks at his press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Ayad Allawi, are reprinted below.

The danger that people feel here is coming from terrorists and insurgents who are trying to destroy the possibility of this country becoming a democracy. Now where do we stand in that fight? We stand on the side of the democrats against the terrorists. And so when people say to me, "Well, look at the difficulties, look at the challenges," I say, "Well, what's the source of that challenge?" The source of that challenge is a wicked, destructive attempt to stop this man, this lady, all these people from Iraq, who want to decide their own future in a democratic way, having that opportunity. . . .

I feel a great sense of honor and also humility at being here, and I would like to thank [Prime Minister Allawi] for your leadership and the immense courage that you and your colleagues have shown.

I've just visited members of the electoral commission and met some of their staff, and I said to them that I thought that they were the heroes of the new Iraq that's being created, because here are people who are risking their lives every day in order to make sure that the people of Iraq get a chance to decide their own destiny democratically.

And I'd just like to say this very strongly to the outside world: Whatever people's feelings or beliefs about the removal of Saddam Hussein and the wisdom of that, there surely is only one side to be on in what is now very clearly a battle between democracy and terror.

On the one side you have people who desperately want to make the democratic process work, and want to have the same type of democratic freedoms other parts of the world enjoy, and on the other side people who are killing and intimidating and trying to destroy a better future for Iraq. . . .

I've nothing but admiration for you and for your colleagues and everyone here, whether from the international community or Iraqis who are trying to make this country better, and you deserve our praise and our support and also our gratitude because you're striking an important blow for democracy everywhere. . . .

When I meet the people working alongside the United Nations—Iraqis in fear of their life every day, because they are trying to bring freedom and democracy to their people—when I see their courage and their determination and know that they speak for the vast majority of people in Iraq who want that democracy and freedom, then I know that we are doing the right thing. . . .

And I will also say this to you: There are people dying in Iraq, but the reason people are dying is because of the terrorism and the intimidation and the people who are deliberately killing anyone trying to make this country better.

Now what should our response be as an international community? Our response should be to stand alongside the democrats—the people who've got the courage to see this thing through—and help them see it through. I've got no doubt at all that that is the right thing for us to do. . . .

And I think that everyone understands that obviously there will be violence that will continue even after an election. On the other hand, we will then have a very clear expression of democratic will. And what is interesting to me was talking to the United Nations officials here who were first of all absolutely committed to the electoral process and secondly said to me in the strongest terms that all the work they were doing in every part of the Iraqi community indicated people actually do want to participate. There is intimidation in certain areas but no shortage whatever of people's desire to participate in democratic elections. . . .

Sometimes when I see some of the reporting of what's happening in Iraq in the rest of the world, I just feel that people should understand how precious what has been created here is. And those people from that electoral commission that I described as the heroes of the new Iraq—every day . . . a lot of them aren't living in the Green Zone, they've got to travel in from outside. They do not know at any point in time whether they're going to be subject to brutality or intimidation, even death, and yet they carry on doing it. Now what a magnificent example of the human spirit—that's the side we should be on.

—*Tony Blair, for the Editors*

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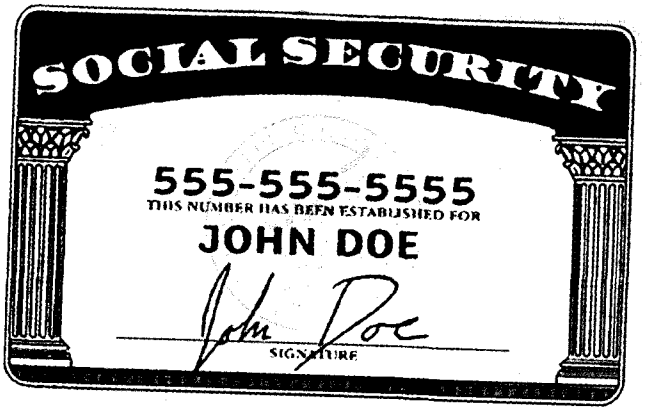
Negotiating with Himself

The president's Social Security pitch needs some work. BY FRED BARNES

AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE just before Christmas, President Bush was George the Salesman, pitching Social Security reform. He failed to make the sale. He stumbled in his explanation of why the system is in trouble. He awkwardly ducked questions on the grounds that he shouldn't "negotiate with myself." Reporters hadn't asked him to negotiate, only to elaborate. Still, the president has improved at spelling out why Social Security is headed for insolvency and how investing payroll taxes in personal accounts will buttress retirement security. But he's hardly as effective as he could be.

Do the president's precise words really matter? In this fight, they do. Much of Washington is against Bush on modernizing Social Security: Democrats, the liberal lobby, AARP, the AFL-CIO, the mainstream media with the exception of the *Washington Post*. And many congressional Republicans are reluctant to take up the issue until they're confident of passing a bill and certain it won't come back to haunt them. So Bush must turn to the public for support, to calm queasy Republicans and to turn wavering Democrats. And to enlist the public, Bush must characterize the thrust of his plan in clear, simple, and reassuring terms.

To sell Social Security reform, the president has already adopted strategies associated with Republican consultant Frank Luntz and Presentation Testing's Richard Thau. They've derived lessons from dozens of focus groups and polls on this issue. One is that most Americans believe Social Security needs to be fixed. That's "axiomatic with the American public," Thau insists. It doesn't mean a majority agrees with the president that "the crisis is now." But neither do they accept the idea that reform should be put off until a crisis hits. So the public is receptive to the case for reform now, if Bush can make it convincingly.



Where Bush is following the advice of Luntz and Thau is in avoiding certain poisonous words. Chief among these is "privatization." Supporters of reform toss that word around to describe the process of creating investment accounts controlled by individual workers. To the public, however, it indicates corporate control of Social Security, which they oppose. Bush never utters the word. Instead of calling investment accounts funded by payroll taxes "private," he calls them "personal."

Another word dropped from the Bush lexicon is wealth, as in, *Personal investment accounts would help Americans build wealth of their own.* What's wrong with this? Thau has found that most Americans don't believe they're capable of creating wealth. That's for rich people. "Economists use the word 'wealth,'" says Luntz. "Average Americans use the word 'savings.'" And their saving produces a "nest egg." Thus, "nest egg" has become an operative phrase for the president. Here is what he said in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention last summer: "We must strengthen Social Security by allowing younger workers to save some of their taxes in a personal account, a nest egg you can call your own and government can never take away."

That, in fact, was an almost perfect sentence for selling Social Security reform. It had two of the three "s" words Luntz says are critical: "strengthen" and "save." Somehow the president left out the third, "secure." It would have fit as a description of the nest egg. Luntz isn't kidding about this. His "Luntz-isms" often work. His recommendation that Republicans drop the phrase "estate tax" in favor of "death tax" has bolstered the drive to eliminate that tax altogether.

At last week's session with reporters, Bush got snarled in his effort to "explain the problem." It now "requires three workers per retiree to keep Social Security promises. In 2040, it will require two workers per employee to meet the promises." He meant to say that two workers won't pay enough in FICA taxes to keep benefits at the current level—that is, without a tax hike or massive borrowing. Bush also noted there's "an unfunded liability" of $11 trillion. Luntz says this phrase should be dumped because "nobody

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knows what an unfunded liability is."

Making the case for reform in the proper sequence is important, but Bush doesn't always do it. He touted investment accounts in exactly the wrong way at the press conference. The key idea is the accounts are owned by each taxpayer and can be inherited by children. Luntz says Bush or whoever is promoting reform needs to frequently say, "It's your money." Instead, the president began by saying individual accounts encourage an "ownership society." Second, they make "capital available." Only then did he get around to how they affect individuals. "It means that people can take their own assets, their own retirement needs, and pass them on, if they so choose, to their family members. That's positive. That's a step." And that's worth mentioning at the top of the argument.

During the presidential campaign and the recent economic summit, Bush laid down three principles for reform—and got them in the wrong order. The first is that "nothing will change if you're retired or near retirement." In other words, your benefits won't be cut. The next is that payroll taxes shouldn't be raised as part of a Social Security fix. And last, younger workers should get the option of using their payroll taxes for investment accounts.

It just makes sense to reverse the order. Why start on the defensive? Get to the good news first, that now even the poorest worker will have a chance to invest and build a nest egg. And, oh, by the way, if you're now relying on a Social Security check or soon will be, don't fret. Your check will never shrink. It will keep rising with the cost of living, forever. Bush got it right in his convention speech, broaching the issue with the promise that, with his reform plan, "more people" would "have the confidence of owning a piece of their retirement." If he can say it right once, he can do it every time, even off the cuff before a room of hostile reporters. ♦

Cynthia McKinney (D-Conspiracy)

She's back.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

THE INCOMING representative from Georgia's 4th congressional district is the outspoken Cynthia McKinney. She is a Democrat, she is 49 years old, and she has held the job before. She held it for a decade, in fact, from 1992, when she became the first black woman elected to Congress from Georgia, to 2002—when, she says, the "hostile corporate media," allied with Republicans, "repeated falsehoods" about her, "distorted" her positions, and drove her from "my seat."

That is McKinney's explanation for her 2002 primary defeat, and she is sticking to it. But there are other explanations. Her father, Georgia state legislator Billy McKinney, shared his version with an Atlanta television reporter on August 19, 2002, the night before she lost. The reporter had asked Billy McKinney about his daughter's use of a years-old, mothballed endorsement from former Atlanta mayor Andrew Young. Such endorsements were worthless, the elder McKinney replied, because "Jews have bought everybody. Jews." In case the reporter didn't understand, he spelled the word: "J-E-W-S." (A few weeks later, in a runoff against a political neophyte, Billy McKinney became a former Georgia state legislator.)

The actual reason why Cynthia McKinney left Congress in 2002 was that, for once, she couldn't outrun her mouth. She had walked along the cutting edge of progressive politics for years—appearing with Louis Farrakhan, calling globalization a "cruel hoax," advocating for Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe—but then, in a March 25, 2002, interview on KPFA Pacifica radio, she suddenly fell off.

"We know there were numerous warnings of the events to come on September 11," McKinney said that day. "What did this administration know and when did it know it, about the events of September 11? Who else knew, and why did they not warn the innocent people of New York who were needlessly murdered? What do they have to hide?" McKinney thought she knew the answer. "What is undeniable," she explained, "is that corporations close to the administration have directly benefited from the increased defense spending arising from the aftermath of September 11th."

It was all downhill from there. On April 12, 2002, a synopsis of the interview appeared in the *Washington Post*. Democrats began distancing themselves from McKinney. She released a statement admitting she was "not aware of any evidence" proving "President Bush or members of his administration have personally profited from the attacks of 9/11," but "a complete investigation might reveal that to be the case." Then again, it might not. For that matter, McKinney might have had no idea what she was talking about.

Appearing in print just months after the September 11 attacks, McKinney's charges couldn't be excused. Nor could her list of campaign donors, which included both terrorist sympathizers like Abdurahman Alamoudi, the former executive director of the American Muslim Council, and apparent actual terrorists

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like former college professor Sami Al-Arian. Nor could her October 12, 2001, letter to Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal, in which she rebuked New York mayor Rudy Giuliani for returning the prince's post-9/11 "gift" of $10 million and urged bin Talal to donate the funds to "charities outside the mayor's control," especially those that dealt with "poor blacks who sleep on the street in the shadows of our nation's Capitol." Giuliani had returned the Saudi's money because it came with the implicit condition that America "address some of the issues that led to such a criminal [9/11] attack," among them "its policies in the Middle East," where "our Palestinian brethren continue to be slaughtered at the hands of Israelis while the world turns the other cheek." To Giuliani, such a statement made excuses for terrorism. This wasn't a problem for McKinney.

And why should it have been? Her bent for conspiracy theories and race-baiting had never cost her politically. When she said in 1996 that "we need to get the government out of the drug business," she was not talking about a possible prescription drug benefit. Whether it was the time she told *USA Today* that "My impression of modern-day black Republicans is they have to pass a litmus test in which all black blood is extracted," or the time she accused Al Gore of having a low "Negro tolerance level," she emerged unscathed from the ensuing kerfuffles. Facing a tough race in 1996, McKinney said Georgia Republicans like her opponent John Mitnick were "neo-Confederates" remaindered from "Civil War days." Amazingly, McKinney ignored the fact that Mitnick was Jewish.

Her father did not. Over and over again, Billy McKinney called Mitnick a "racist Jew." As *Slate*'s Chris Suellentrop noticed, when the *New York Times* asked Billy McKinney to elaborate on his comments, he simply repeated that Mitnick "is a racist Jew, that's what he is, isn't he?" The controversy over Billy McKinney's comments lasted weeks. Disgraced, he resigned from his daughter's campaign. That year, Cynthia McKinney won 58 percent of the vote.

In 2002, though, thanks to McKinney's interview with Pacifica radio, the tiny streams of anti-McKinney criticism that had been collecting in pools for years turned into a flood. The September 11 attacks were vibrant and terrifying memories when McKinney accused the president of profiting from them. Remember, too, that when McKinney accused the president of being a calculating war profiteer, his approval rating was over 75 percent.

But times change. Two years later, McKinney is still her old self, while the world has become a lot more accommodating to loony theories about President Bush. Apparently her own district is no exception. The 4th District this year was an open seat; Denise Majette, who defeated McKinney in 2002, decided to run for the Senate instead, but McKinney still faced five opponents in last summer's Democratic primary and dispatched them all without a runoff. And while she avoided making any controversial statements, and politely deflected criticism of things she had said in the past, her conspiracism and racialism were still there beneath the surface.

Occasionally they would bubble up. McKinney is defensive about the Pacifica interview, and there are links on her campaign website to two articles by the left-wing BBC journalist Greg Palast that attempt to absolve her of conspiracy-mongering. One of these articles is entitled "The Screwing of Cynthia McKinney." The other is entitled "Re-lynching Cynthia McKinney." Palast writes that McKinney has never actually *said* President Bush had foreknowledge of the September 11 attacks. Which is true. She hasn't. She's just implied it repeatedly.

What's striking about McKinney's website is that, even as it attempts to "debunk" a variety of "misinformation" about her, it also takes great pains to claim vindication for that same misinformation. There is a link, for example, to "Exposed: The Carlyle Group," a 48-minute documentary that purports to reveal "the depth of corruption and deceit within the highest ranks of our government." There is a link to an article in the South DeKalb County *CrossRoads News* entitled "Where is Cynthia McKinney During 9/11 Hearings?" in which the author describes being "enraged" that McKinney was not included in the public hearings of the 9/11 Commission, since she "was the only elected official who had the guts" to "bring President Bush's war profiting scheme to the light."

A few links more, and you wind up at McKinney's speech "Democracy Is Under Attack—Let's take it Back." The speech is a sort of lodestone for McKinniacs. It is a rambling series of remarks delivered at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem in July 2003. It is an angry speech. "I can't be calm when I drive through sections of Atlanta that look more like Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, than America," McKinney explains. Yet the speech is notable mainly for the way in which it references McKin-

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Cynthia McKinney

Getty Images

ney's conspiracy theorist guru, a man named Michael Ruppert.

Michael Ruppert is a former LAPD detective who is best known for his theories on CIA drug trafficking. Those theories—namely, that the CIA was behind the crack cocaine epidemic in America's inner cities—briefly made headlines in mainstream newspapers in 1996, and Ruppert is hoping for a sequel. Since 9/11, he has toured the country discussing how the Bush administration, Enron, Israeli intelligence, the Pakistani ISI, the Saudis, and Osama bin Laden were behind the terrorist attacks. Ruppert's theories are lucrative. Chip Berlet, who studies conspiracism as a senior analyst at Public Research Associates, a progressive group, told me that Ruppert speaks regularly to sold-out crowds.

"As you may know, I'm involved with Mike Ruppert of *From the Wilderness*," McKinney says in her "Democracy Is Under Attack" speech. *From the Wilderness* is the title of Ruppert's newsletter and website. McKinney probably got the idea that the USS *Abraham Lincoln* was "really in San Diego harbor" when Bush landed on it in May 2003 from Ruppert. So, too, her idea that Bush and his friends stood to profit from the 9/11 attacks, which she expands upon in another manifesto, the March 2002 "Thoughts on Our War Against Terrorism":

> Former President Bush sits on the board of the Carlyle Group. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that on a single day last month, Carlyle earned $237 million selling shares in United Defense Industries, the Army's fifth-largest contractor. The stock offering was well timed: Carlyle officials say they decided to take the company public only after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Such ideas figure prominently in *The Truth and Lies of 9/11*, a videotaped lecture that Ruppert delivered at Portland State University on November 28, 2001. The lecture is 135 minutes long. It feels much longer. In it, Ruppert talks about the CIA, the Bush administration, the Carlyle Group, UNOCAL oil pipelines in Afghanistan, the Mossad, and—go figure—orange juice. The bottom line is that the Bush administration knew about the 9/11 attacks in advance and allowed them to happen for profit. Also, the "world financial system" is on the brink of "collapse."

In its apocalyptic overtones, in its internationalist plot, in its view that apparent enemies are secretly collaborating, Ruppert's *The Truth and Lies of 9/11* is a textbook conspiracy theory. It is also a vehicle for Cynthia McKinney. She utters the penultimate line, and it's a doozy. "The American people," she says, "might have a criminal syndicate running their government."

"It's a sinkhole," said Chip Berlet, when I first asked him about these conspiracy theories. He sounded a note of regret about McKinney. "A lot of McKinney's complaints about the government are standard progressive fare."

But which ones? Her conspiracy theories, or her hard-left politics? In truth, the line between the two is increasingly difficult to discern. I bought my copy of *The Truth and Lies of 9/11* last June, at the "Take Back America" conference for progressive and Democratic activists in Washington, D.C. In a ballroom nearby, in earshot of the bookstand where Ruppert's video was being sold, Hillary Clinton and George Soros delivered keynote speeches. A few weeks after the conference, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which glibly hints at possible government foreknowledge of the terrorist attacks, was screened for the Senate Democratic caucus at the Uptown Theater in Washington. The film received a standing ovation.

Maybe all of this helps explain why Cynthia McKinney got her seat back. Maybe when McKinney shared her disturbing theories about President Bush in 2002, she was not so much falling off the edge of progressive politics as anticipating it. And she shows no signs of slowing down. "I will probably get in trouble for what I've said to you tonight," McKinney told her audience at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in 2003. "But it won't be the first time I get in trouble for telling the truth. And I'll continue to tell the truth. As I have said before, I won't sit down and I won't shut up." Too bad. ♦

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The Mismatch Game

How law school race preferences harm black students. BY TERRY EASTLAND

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION emerged in the 1960s as a policy intended to help blacks. How, then, would institutions committed to affirmative action respond if it could be shown that the policy does blacks more harm than good? Richard Sander, a law professor at UCLA, is about to find out.

This week the *Stanford Law Review* will publish his article, "A Systematic Analysis of Affirmative Action in American Law Schools." By "affirmative action" in the law schools, Sander means the racially preferential variety used in admissions, and his focus is exclusively on preferences extended to blacks, the original beneficiary group, the other such groups having been added later (and for less compelling reasons).

The title of the 117-page study is as dull as Sander's conclusion is sharp. "What I find and describe," he writes, "is a system of racial preferences that, in one realm after another, produces more harms than benefits for its putative beneficiaries." Sander makes the further, riveting point that "the annual production of new black lawyers would probably increase if racial preference were abolished tomorrow."

Who is Richard Sander anyway? Perhaps not the man you would imagine from the analysis above. A lifelong Democrat, a liberal on most issues, he has a long record of involvement in civil rights issues, including housing segregation. His son is biracial. "So the question," he notes in the article, "of how non-whites are treated and how they fare in higher education gives rise in me to all the doubts and worries of a parent." Because he favors race-conscious strategies in principle, his article is a classic instance of following an argument wherever it leads. At *volokh.com*—the blog where he summarized his findings—he wrote that he was "surprised and dismayed" by his "generally negative conclusions," which "put me at odds with many close friends."

In an interview, he told me there could be "a significant professional cost" for having written the article, which is already under attack. But he remains confident of his findings, and he's prepared to defend them. He'll reply to critics in a future issue of the law review. And he's writing a book looking at the impact of affirmative action on all favored groups, not just blacks.

There's something else to report about Sander, perhaps the most important thing. Besides being a lawyer, he's also an economist. And "A Systemic Analysis" is plainly the work of an economist. Sander doesn't address the familiar legal issues involved with affirmative action (no parsing of strict scrutiny here) but instead asks whether preferences "meet their simplest goals of producing more and better black lawyers."

To answer it, Sander needed relevant data. Through FOIA requests he collected 2002 and 2003 admissions data from seven public law schools, some of them among the nation's very best. He also worked from the data gathered by the Law School Admission Council on one national cohort of law students—27,000 students who entered law school in 1991. LSAC, which tracked the students (representing 95 percent of all accredited law schools) through 1997, collected information on the students' admissions credentials (LSAT score and undergraduate GPA), race, academic performance, and bar exam outcomes.

Sander was working with his data sets 18 months ago when the Supreme Court upheld the admissions preferences used by the Michigan law school. Justice O'Connor's opinion for the Court in *Grutter* v. *Bollinger* accepted the notion advanced by Michigan and its large roster of amici that preferences benefit those they target, which in this case included blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans. Sander had come to the opposite conclusion, and what he noticed about the Michigan law school case (and its companion case from the University of Michigan) was, he told me, how "saturated" they were with social science. "So much of it was really bad. That was one of the reasons I wrote [the article]."

In the picture Sander draws, the admissions preferences for blacks are very large. This is the case with respect to almost all law schools. Which is to say, contrary to conventional wisdom, preferences aren't confined to the elite schools. Indeed, "affirmative action has a cascading effect through American legal education." The top-tier law schools enroll not only the small number of blacks who don't need preferences to get in but also less-qualified black applicants whose credentials would have sufficed to gain them admission under a race-blind standard to a second-tier school. Second-tier schools are then forced to choose between having few if any black students (under a race-blind standard) or using preferences to reach *their* racial goals. The second-tier schools make the latter choice, and so the effects cascade to the third-tier schools and on down the law-school ladder. There is thus a "system" in place whose net effect is "to move nearly all blacks up a tier (or two) in the law school hierarchy." Only at the bottom—in the

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CORBIS / Phil Schermeister: UCLA Law School graduation, 1989

lowest-tier schools—do you find black students who are probably unqualified for any law school.

The cascading effect leaves most black students "mismatched" with peers whose academic credentials (in terms of LSAT scores and UGPA) are superior. Which means, as Sander puts it, that "nearly all blacks [are placed] at an enormous academic disadvantage in the schools they attend." And so there are "mismatch effects." In their first year, about 50 percent of black law students end up in the bottom tenth of their class, and roughly two-thirds in the bottom fifth, with only 8 percent placing in the top half. The grades of black law school students go down a bit from the first to the third year. Black students have a much higher attrition rate than white students (19 percent compared with 8 percent). Sander finds that fact unsurprising, since students (of whatever race) with the very worst grades are those who are expelled or drop out. Finally, black law school graduates fail the bar exam at four times the rate of white graduates. Sander concludes that more than 40 percent of black students starting out to become lawyers never reach that goal.

Sander faults the preferences used to admit blacks for the systematic mismatch and its effects. He contends that black students perform the same academically as whites with similar test scores, and that if blacks were not mismatched, they would have better grades and learn more. And he adduces evidence showing that grades are powerful predictors of bar exam performance. Not incidentally, employers, he also found, prefer to hire graduates with good grades.

Sander envisions a law school universe without preferences, which is not, he says, "an unthinkable armageddon." There would be many fewer blacks enrolled in the top 20 schools, he says, but overall the number of black students would shrink only slightly—by about 14 percent. And without mismatching and its effects, black students would perform better, fewer would fail to graduate, and 8 percent more would pass the bar.

Because elite schools would have few black students—perhaps 1 or 2 percent of their student bodies—and because those schools fancy themselves as critical in shaping the views of future national leaders, Sander suggests "an intermediate step" by which the elite schools would still use preferences, but on a limited basis, such that a class is 4 percent (and not the current 7 to 8 percent) black. Sander says this would dampen the cascading and bring an end to mismatching "at some point fairly high in the law school spectrum." It would appear that Sander offers the 4 percent solution as a concession to elite opinion, a way to advance a dialogue on the costs and benefits of preferences, not because he believes in it himself. After all, his basic conclusion is this: "Blacks are the victims of law school programs of affirmative action, not the beneficiaries."

To judge by the academic response so far, Sander is going to be busy discussing his analysis. A group including the main architect of the Michigan law school admissions policy has written an article disagreeing with Sander's conclusions, including his assessment of what would happen under race-blind admissions. They claim the black law school population would shrink by 35 to 45 percent, and that the number of black graduates who pass the bar would decline by 25 to 30 percent. But other academics working from Sander's data sets are reaching the same conclusion as he. If Sander wins the social-science battle, that could have repercussions in litigation over admissions preferences, especially in the Supreme Court, where one of the justices who voted to sustain the Michigan policy, Justice Stephen Breyer, practices a jurisprudence (applauded by liberals) that looks to the consequences of a policy in assessing its legal merit.

Sander's article promises to reopen an issue that seemed settled in *Grutter*, notwithstanding that it was a 5-to-4 decision. Sander even imagines the next major legal challenge to admissions preferences: a lawsuit brought by black plaintiffs "who were admitted, spent years and thousands of dollars on their educations, and then never passed the bar and never became lawyers—all because of the misleading double standards used by law schools to admit them, and the schools' failure to disclose to them the uniquely long odds against their becoming lawyers."

That would certainly disturb the sleep of all the law school admissions officers who breathed a sigh of satisfaction after *Grutter*. ♦

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The U.N. Sex Scandal

Exploitation, abuse, and other humanitarian efforts. BY JOSEPH LOCONTE

LAST MONTH a classified United Nations report prompted Secretary General Kofi Annan to admit that U.N. peacekeepers and staff have sexually abused or exploited war refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The worst of the 150 or so allegations of misconduct—some of them captured on videotape—include pedophilia, rape, and prostitution. While a U.N. investigation into the scandal continues, the organization has just suspended two more peacekeepers in neighboring Burundi over similar charges. The revelations come three years after another U.N. report found "widespread" evidence of sexual abuse of West African refugees.

"The issue with the U.N. is that peacekeeping operations unfortunately seem to be doing the same thing that other militaries do," Gita Sahgal of Amnesty International told the *Christian Science Monitor.* "Even the guardians have to be guarded." That's not far off the mark. Various U.N. reports and interviews with humanitarian groups suggest that international peacekeeping missions are creating a predatory sexual culture among vulnerable refugees—from relief workers who demand sexual favors in exchange for food to U.N. troops who rape women at gunpoint.

Allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct by U.N. staff stretch back at least a decade, to operations in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. A 2001 report, released by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children, found that sexual violence against refugees in West Africa was endemic (though some of its findings were denied by a subsequent U.N. team). A year later a coalition of religious organizations sent a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell urging the United States to send more human rights monitors into Congo. The U.N. then introduced a "code of conduct" to help prevent future abuses, including prohibitions against sexual activity between staff and children and the exchange of money or food for sex.

The U.N. abuses are especially grievous in Congo, where sexual violence against women and children has been a weapon of war employed by most of the armies in the six-year-old conflict.

It now appears, however, that little has changed on the ground. The U.N. Mission in Congo (MONUC) employs about 10,800 peacekeepers from 50 countries, in addition to many civilian staff. Yet there is no independent oversight of U.N. operations in its refugee camps. For that matter, none of the international agencies in the country has U.N. authority to protect the civil rights of internal refugees. Almost a year after the MONUC office in Kindu sent a memo in August 2003 to its headquarters in Kinshasa, detailing suspicions of sexual exploitation, the London *Independent* discovered action still hadn't been taken.

"We recognize that sexual exploitation and abuse is a problem in some missions," said Jane Holl Lute, a U.N. assistant secretary general, at a recent press conference. "It's obvious that the measures we've had in place have not been adequate." Relief organizations and human rights groups agree, describing as "urgent" the need to protect young girls from U.N. militia and staff. As Patrick Barbier, of Doctors Without Borders, told one newspaper: "It is clear that the necessary steps to protect the displaced population from violence and sexual exploitation have not been followed."

Indeed, the international operation in Bunia, home to about 16,000 refugees, threatens to become another monument to U.N. paralysis and failure. Investigators describe a "significant, widespread and ongoing" pattern of abuse at the camp—an astonishing conclusion given that many women are afraid to report sexual violence against them. At least one senior official in charge of security in Bunia is implicated in the scandal, and U.N. peacekeepers allegedly have threatened investigators with retaliation. According to the *Economist*, a U.N. probe is even considering the possibility that MONUC has been infiltrated by "organized pedophiles who recruit their friends."

The U.N. abuses are especially grievous in Congo, where sexual violence against women and children has been a weapon of war employed by most of the armies involved in the six-year-old conflict. Called "Africa's world war," it has involved militias from Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda, and Congo. Despite a peace agreement reached in 2002, the fighting continues:

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According to the International Rescue Committee, more than 31,000 civilians are dying a month from violence, disease, and famine; tens of thousands remain in refugee camps, mostly women and children. In Bunia alone, a U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) program has treated 2,000 victims of sexual violence in recent months.

Kofi Annan has insisted on "zero tolerance" of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers, but U.N. rules apply only to U.N. employees; military personnel fall under the jurisdiction of their own governments. Only a few peacekeepers have been deported, and no U.N. staff have been charged with criminal activity.

That's prompting tough talk from some U.S. officials about American assistance for U.N. peacekeeping missions. The United States will give $490 million next year to support about 62,000 military personnel and civilian police serving in 16 U.N. operations around the world. "Until the U.N. is willing to take decisive action and take responsibility for these acts, we should look seriously at the funding portion of the peacekeeping operations," says a foreign policy aide to Kansas Republican Sam Brownback, who serves on the Senate Appropriations Committee. "I don't know any other way to force Annan to pay attention."

This latest U.N. episode, piled on top of the ongoing Oil for Food scandal in Iraq, may help focus the mind. The sexual abuses committed, or ignored, by U.N. personnel violate the institution's Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A 2002 U.N. report characterized the sexual exploitation issue as "a betrayal of trust as well as a catastrophic failure of protection."

Peacekeepers as predators? It's difficult to see how another U.N. probe, proclamation, or committee report could reverse that perception anytime soon. ♦

The Philosophers' Blog

Where condescension is king.

BY ROSS DOUTHAT

OF ALL the left-wing responses to Bush's reelection—the crying jags, the applications for Canadian citizenship, the bulk orders of Nicholson Baker's *Checkpoint*—perhaps the strangest of all can be found online at *left2right.typepad.com*, where a roster of academic all-stars have embarked on a mission to save American liberalism, one blog post at a time. There was no shortage of volunteers for the job: *Left2Right*, as the site is dubbed, boasts an astonishing 26 co-bloggers, representing 19 American universities and including such luminaries as Princeton's Kwame Anthony Appiah and Stanford's Richard Rorty (who has not yet, alas, contributed a post).

What exactly the job *is* hasn't been entirely hashed out. They seem to want to win national elections, and to have figured out that this means appealing to at least a few conservative-leaning voters. The blog was launched in November with the subtitle "How can the Left get through to the Right?" which had a certain pithy appeal. But apparently someone pointed out that "get through to the Right" might be construed as insulting thick-skulled Bush voters, and it was recently announced that the earlier subheading had been "superseded" in favor of a "tentative re-statement" of purpose.

So instead of brisk condescension, we now have Mission Statement 2.0, in which the assembled professors announce their intention

> to consider whether liberal ideas should be somehow reconsidered —in some respects revised, in others perhaps merely re-stated— with the aim of increasing the overall ratio of dialog to diatribe in the American political forum. Some of us will be trying out various ways of re-thinking and re-formulating those ideas; others may end up arguing that such attempts are unnecessary, even counter-productive.

This sounds almost sensible, even if the writer couldn't resist the temptation to spell "dialogue" without that oh-so-plebeian "ue." But it turns out that when academics gather to consider revising and restating liberalism, the "revisions" have the feel of deck chairs being reshuffled on the *Titanic*. These are thinkers, after all, who have given their lives to left-liberalism in its purest, most theoretical form, in which all the significant questions have been settled and the only remaining difficulty is determining how many sexual identities can dance on the head of a Rawlsian pin. Asking this collection of thinkers to "get through" to the right by "restating" their beliefs is like putting the Holy Office of the Inquisition in charge of missionary work.

The first wave of posts from *Left2Right*'s contributors—no great surprise here—were thus concerned less with reformulating liberalism than with re-shouting its most strident talking points from the political rooftops. For Seana Shiffrin, of UCLA's philosophy department, the lesson of November was that Kerry should have made Abu Ghraib the "centerpoint" of his campaign; for Elizabeth Anderson, who teaches phi-

Ross Douthat's Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class *(Hyperion) will be published in March.*

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losophy and women's studies at Michigan, the best way to "get through to the Right in the face of its mass mobilization of individual and group antipathies" was "by standing up for ourselves, proudly defending our positions, ideals, and identities, and exposing the Right's tactics for what they are: ugly, nasty, small-minded bigotry. . . . It is time for the Left to make the Right feel ashamed of its nastiness."

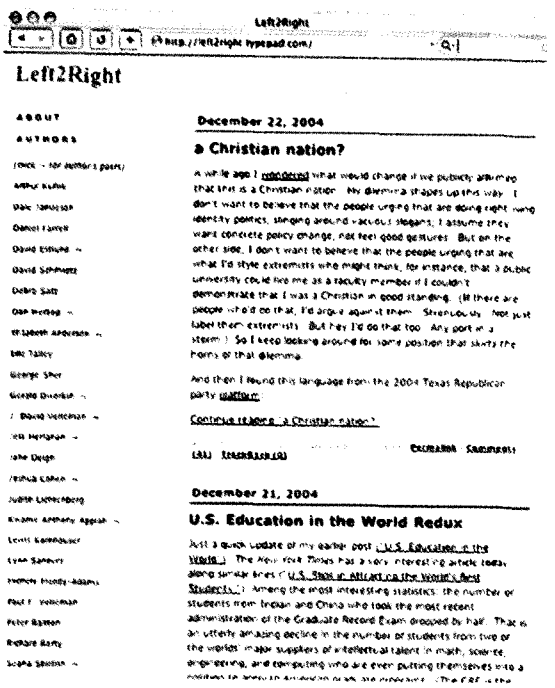
So it's going to be tough love for red America once the philosopher-kings finish revamping American liberalism. But at least the *Left2Righters* weren't falling into the trap of talking down to conservatives—except when Anderson called the Right's ideas "benighted," or when J. David Velleman of Michigan explained that the religious publishing industry feeds off people who feel a "widespread sense of personal disorientation and directionlessness."

Those lapses aside, there was no condescension at all. Except, perhaps, for this explanation, courtesy of K. Anthony Appiah, for why so many GOP-voting types seem to resent academic elites:

> Some of those right-wing evangelicals apparently care whether or not we have a good opinion of them. (If they didn't, the resentment they display toward the "liberal media" would make no sense.) Whereas I know no one among the liberal media elite or among liberal academics who cares very much that many right-wing evangelicals have contempt for us. We care how they vote—for instrumental reasons; we may even care that they are mistaken, for their sakes; but we don't feel diminished by their contempt. . . . (The situation is analogous to the one that obtains with respect to social respect in class- and status-based hierarchies: a peasant can spit when milord walks by, but it won't damage his lordship's self- esteem. But when milord brings his handkerchief to his nose as the peasant approaches, the peasant is stung.)

It's just an analogy, right? It's not as if Appiah is saying that evangelicals actually *are* peasants, and that he and his co-bloggers actually *are* noblemen, is it?

As *Left2Right*'s blogging has picked up steam, the *MoveOn.org*-style "shout louder" theory of political engagement and the crushing condescension have both diminished (maybe changing a mission statement does make a difference). This has had the unfortunate side effect of making the site less entertaining. As anyone who reads or writes a blog soon learns, a mix of outrage and arrogance



is preferable to what's replaced them on *Left2Right*—a wearying combination of earnest bewilderment and political naiveté.

The latter is epitomized by the recent suggestion, from Michigan's Velleman, that because *Roe* v. *Wade* hurts Democrats politically, the Left should shift its energies to passing a constitutional amendment enshrining first and second-trimester abortion as an enumerated right, rather than one that emanates from a penumbra. (Presumably they could pair this amendment with the ERA, and maybe throw in some price-control legislation for good measure.)

Velleman, at least, is trying. Mostly, *Left2Right* is thick with intellectual exhaustion—with writers bemoaning the ignorance of the American voter, or the decline of American education, or the plight of the American city, and then throwing up their hands and hoping that some new John Dewey will crop up in the comments page. Combine this torpid politics-of-despair with the self-satisfaction that tinges every mention of conservatives, and you have a spectacularly unappealing political movement—and what's worse, a deeply tedious blog. The Republican National Committee could no doubt add to the GOP's 2006 totals by encouraging wavering liberals to visit *Left2Right*.

Still, there are enough bright, theater-of-the-absurd moments to repay an occasional visit to the site. Consider the post in which Jeff McMahan, professor of ethics and political philosophy at Rutgers, seems to discover "support our troops" bumper stickers for the first time:

> Vehicles in New Jersey are covered with decals representing little ribbons inscribed with the legend: "Support Our Troops." I have done a lot of driving recently and have noticed geographical disparities in the distribution of these symbols. . . . They are also disproportionately displayed on SUVs and vans, which isn't surprising given that the owners are disproportionately reliant on the oil supplies that our soldiers are in Iraq to protect (among their other purposes). . . . What is it exactly that these decals exhort us to do? How can I, or anyone, support the troops themselves? What can we possibly do for them? It seems that the message is really an exhortation to support the war.

Having cracked the peasants' code, presumably Milord McMahan will turn his attention to the implicit warmongering in *The Star-Spangled Banner*. With intellectual enemies like these, do conservatives really need friends? ♦

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The Millennium War

A report from the Mesopotamian front

By Austin Bay

Our Blackhawk flight from Victory Base to Babylon packs 2,700 years of Iraqi history into a 100-kilometer dash at altitudes a cubit or so above the tallest date palms. Every Iraqi August day is a blowtorch by 1030 hours, and this morning is no exception. As I wait in the lead helicopter, sweat rolls from my helmet band and streaks down my face, soaking the cotton neck gaiter I use as a dust mask. For the umpteenth time in the last three months I promise I will never again damn summer in central Texas.

I'm flying with British Major-General Andrew Graham, the deputy commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq. He has a briefing scheduled at Camp Alfa, also known as Babil, site of ancient Babylon but temporarily the headquarters of Multi-National Division-Center South.

As General Graham takes his seat on the other side of our Blackhawk, I hassle with my shoulder harness. Even when you've worn it for weeks, Kevlar body armor, especially with heavy ceramic inserts, always adds an odd wobble or width to your body, and right now my harness just doesn't want to bite snug and tight. General Graham gracefully snaps his seatbelt, checks his headphones and mike, and both our pilots nod. I think General Graham's amused at Colonel Bay's one-handed battle of the harness—there's a twinkle in his eye.

The Blackhawk engines reach that perfect whine, the scream of escape velocity, and the helicopter springs up and out—over the concrete walls and razor wire, over the construction sites, over the observation towers and Abrams tanks that separate the Coalition's base at the international airport from the rest of Baghdad's western neighborhoods.

As the helicopter banks, a snapshot panorama flashes by—a woman stands on a roof shaking a clothesline, delicate scaffolding surrounds a mosque's minaret, cars jam a wide boulevard. The weapons, the construction, the glimpse of clean laundry mark Iraq as it is in the late summer of 2004: a difficult, fascinating kaleidoscope of intermittent war and tenuous peace, of poverty amid economic progress, of new hope plagued by vicious terror. This thought crosses my mind, one of those thoughts I shouldn't have but do: Maybe Baghdad 2004's not so different from Manhattan on 9/11.

Fifteen minutes later, after a three-minute touchdown in Baghdad's Green Zone (renamed the International Zone) where two British diplomats board the trail copter, our air convoy skirts the edge of a sprawling industrial park, then once again crosses the Tigris River. We are now over Iraq's real Green Zone, the Green Zone of Mesopotamia, the date palms, goat herds, and networked canals connecting the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the waterways that seeded Abraham's Ur and Hammurabi's Babylon. This is Iraq's splendid history, a living echo of what the region was, the Eden of city-states, the consolidator and exporter of the Agricultural Revolution.

After another 10 minutes of low-level jinking to avoid potential ground fire, over the copilot's left shoulder a hill emerges from the haze. At a distance the white stone isn't so hideous, but as we near the landing zone, the palace playpen Saddam built on the mound above Babylon becomes the cruel marble kitsch it is.

The Blackhawks hover over Camp Alfa's landing zone. Sure, it's too hot and there's too much war, yet the poetry's right there: Saddam's mound begs comparison to a trunkless stone leg eroding in the desert. "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings," Shelley opined, "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" I don't despair, I just get ready to exit the helicopter. Saddam's in jail, not in a romantic's poem. Unlike those of Shelley's despot, Saddam's victims aren't forgotten, nor, unfortunately, is his lousy architecture.

"End State," the poli-sci mavens call it—or, to add the potent adjective, *strategic* End State, the grand goal. Wherever the great King Ozy-

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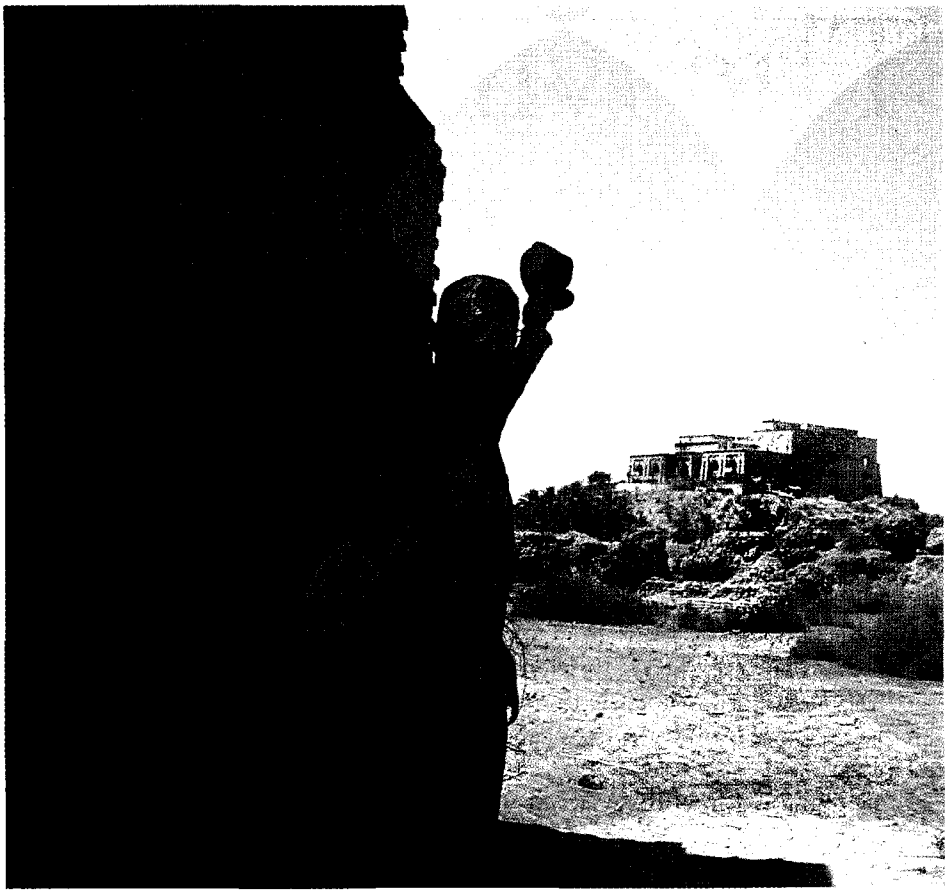
mandias thought he was heading, Shelley described his statue's shattered visage, a fossil relic of arrogance. Arrogance remains an American enemy, the arrogance of thug elites who never believe they'll be held accountable for their crimes.

Here's an example that drew a sad laugh when a friend working with Special Operations recounted it during a briefing on August 24. Iraqi cops and Coalition force advisers arrested one Ahmad T. Tahir (also known as Mohammad Bogy) at the wake of a man Tahir had murdered on August 22. Tahir had ties to Saddam's regime, possibly serving as an enforcer for one of Saddam's intelligence services. When the Coalition forces arrived, Tahir tried to flee into his victim's house. When the police chased him he tried to hide behind the daughters and wife of his victim. The women then began slapping Tahir and pushing him forward toward the police and security troops, who proceeded to capture him. The women told the police that "[Tahir] didn't think we could do anything to him, and that's why he was here."



The author at the ruins of Babylon

In street slang, Tahir/Mohammad Bogy, the killer, was strutting his stuff until Iraqi police backed by Green Berets jammed an assault rifle into his nose. Thug arrogance is all too common a feature of the world's hard corners, where the criminals have dominated for so long they are certain their iron wills and unmitigated violence will continue to cow all opponents. It's why the only way to beat the arrogant is to beat them and punch a rifle barrel into the cold amazement of their eyes. I state it crudely with good purpose, for this is a rubber-meets-the-road example of what scholarly strategists mean when they describe war as a clash of wills.

Until mid-April 2003, Mohammad Bogy's bosses, Saddam Hussein and his cadre of yes-men, believed they would once again survive an American-led attack, and personal survival (with a few billion in Swiss and Singaporean banks) is arguably the only End State that matters to a tyrant like Saddam. Dictators may work nationalist, tribalist, religious, or ideological angles, but the big goal is unbridled personal power and glory. Check the bricks in Babylon to confirm megalomania. Nebuchadnezzar placed bricks throughout the city proclaiming his glorious victory over the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem. Saddam, like an anti-Disney, erected tasteless replicas of Babylon's walls, complete with facsimile copies of Nebuchadnezzar's brick boasts—the Saddam bricks substituting his name for Nebuchadnezzar's. It's more evidence of Saddam's most-desired strategic End State: to be history's supreme Mesopotamian potentate, the Great Leader who not only slew Jews to the west and Persians to the east, but once again made Baghdad the epicenter of the world.

A religious End State guides al Qaeda: an Islamist end, or eschatology, that marks the final completion of earthly history. These religious imperialists envision an empire of the faithful, the Caliphate restored, then expanded to planetary dimensions. Call it Islamofascist globalization: al Qaeda's definition of victory.

Given the blood the two have spilled in the pursuit of these visions, only a fool will sneer at Saddam and al

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Qaeda. In a very real way, both the despot and the Islamist imperialist are at war with modernity. The most successful modern political systems liberate human creativity—they are more open than closed, especially to the flow of information and to economic experimentation. A freed imagination ultimately demands a say in governance—which means the end of the tyrant. Recall bin Laden complained of "80 years of Muslim indignation and suffering," the result of Turkish reformer Kemal Atatürk's 1924 decision to end the caliphate. History, going wrong for Islamist expansionists since at least the 16th century, went totally tilt when the caliphate dissolved. Twenty-first century Islamist imperialists aim for global domination, with themselves as the sole interpreters and enforcers of what they deem God's laws. An open system is anathema to theological tyranny.

This means the despot and theo-fascist are at war with the United States, the embodiment of political modernity. Saddam knew this in February 1990 when he spoke in Amman, Jordan, and vaguely alluded to America's unchecked post-Cold War power. Bin Laden knew this when he declared war on the United States in 1996.

The criminal empire and the global caliphate are enemy End States. They are not mutually compatible—at some point these enemies of ours turn on each other. But anyone with experience in the developing world knows the Islamofascists feed off the unfortunate victims of the secular despots. Particularly in the Middle East, the peoples the secular despots rob and oppress supply the Islamofascists' new recruits. That makes it both a great mistake and a dangerous case of psychological denial to talk of Exit Strategy, when there is no exit from a war with such twinned enemies.

Let's stipulate that a world where America has the same sense of security it had on September 10, 2001, is a dream state—not an End State for the global war on terror. Technology is a culprit. Technology has compressed the planet, with positive effects in communication, trade, and transportation; with horrifyingly negative effects in weaponry. Decades ago, radio, phone cables on the seabed, long-range aircraft, and then nuclear weapons shrunk the oceans. September 11 demonstrated that religious killers could turn domestic jumbo jets into strategic bombers—and the oceans were no obstacles. "Technological compression" is a fact; it cannot be reversed. To deny it or ignore it has deadly consequences.

One of the problems we face in defining what constitutes an American victory or acceptable End State in the global war on terror is the war's dirt-stupid name. One might as well declare war on exercise as declare war on terror, for terror is only a tactic used by an enemy. In this case the inept name has led to needless political confusion and loss of clarity about long-range goals.

In September 2001, I suggested we call this hideous conflict the Millennium War, a nom de guerre that captures both the chronological era and the ideological dimensions of the conflict. If there is one mistake we've made in fighting this war, it's the way we've soft-pedaled the ideological dimensions, and that soft-pedaling has blurred our goals. This really is a fight for the future, a battle between our free, open political system and the unholy alliance of despots and millenarian Islamofascists whose very existence depends on denying liberty.

Recognizing the ideological component as an essential feature of the war indicates the most desirable End State to the war would have two features: (1) democratic nations that police terrorism, instead of promoting it or seeding it; (2) an Islamic clerisy that understands its role on Earth is spiritual guidance and education, not temporal political control.

A large order? The task is absolutely huge, but so was World War II, when heavy history fell on "the greatest generation." It's this generation's turn to accept the challenge of building free nation states and protecting Muslim moderates, or we will face terrible destructive consequences.

The Polish operations officer briefing Major-General Graham ends his presentation with a discussion of Multi-National Division-Center South's plans for the upcoming Shia pilgrimage season. The Poles are working with Iraqi authorities. This is a modern war, an intricate war in which military, economic, cultural, and political elements intertwine. Handling bus traffic and pilgrims' parking issues has priority. Certainly, pilgrims are targets for terrorists; they are also customers and, as one of the briefers points out, tourists.

We leave the headquarters and walk to our motor convoy. A day earlier General Graham and I had been discussing Grand Ayatollah Sistani and his recent return to Najaf in the midst of Moktada al-Sadr's latest Mahdi Militia escapade. "Sistani is a living example of an apolitical Islamic clergyman," General Graham had said. "He specifically says his role is that of spiritual guide." I mention that to one of the Polish lieutenant-colonels walking with us. He nods in agreement. Sistani is the most influential Shia religious leader. Now with Saddam gone, his voice is free.

As we reach the vehicles one of the U.S. officers, Major John Hoppman, who works with me in the Corps plans section, asks me if we'll get to visit the ruins.

"Of course," I reply. "It's our turn to be tourists."

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Babylon was an old-style military empire that attacked its neighbors, then ruled them by force. Our contemporary world is filled with petty empires that differ very little from Babylon, fake states where gangs or tribal clans rule by oppression, not consensus. In too many hard corners of our planet the foundation for a modern state never formed, but the trappings—capital, an army, a seat in the U.N., IMF loans—can be acquired. Legitimate authority? Rule of law? Forget it. The bayonet to the throat remains the only process for establishing authority, making "sovereignty" within Rand McNally borders a constantly contested notion. In such tribal, feudal, and anarchic quarters, lip service may be paid to common humanity, but the implementation of laws protecting basic human rights is rare.

For centuries the fake nation-states didn't matter too much. Tribal battles remained local horrors. Not any more. Enforcing local dictatorial control with arrows or assault rifles is one thing—but now the rogue rulers use nerve gas. With ballistic missiles at hand, with terrorists willing to fly commercial jets into skyscrapers, rogues' possession and use of chemical weapons is no longer a local matter: Technological compression means a local war can become a global war. We learned, at a terrible price, that Islamofascist plotting in Afghanistan produces terrorist crime in New York and Washington. To return to an era where distance made a difference requires ditching essential technology. Ban the Internet? Ban the 747? Ban satellite television?

This is why the End State in Iraq matters, and why there is no Exit Strategy from the task in Mesopotamia.

Iraq, long plundered by despots, should be a wealthy country. It has water, an agricultural base, a source of capital (oil), and people willing to work. It is the best place to begin to reform the dysfunctional political systems that shackle and rob the vast majority of Middle Easterners. Success in Iraq would create conditions to break the region's endless cycle of robbery and violence. It would also force angry Middle Eastern Muslims to finally confront the inadequacies of their own societies instead of blaming Europe, the United States, and Israel for their centuries of fossilization and decline.

What are the features of this ideal Iraqi End State? It would be democratic and prosperous, capable of providing its own internal security and of deterring external threats. This is a tall order, and we should not underestimate the difficulty of achieving it.

Perhaps some of the war's architects and supporters thought achieving a democratic End State in Iraq would be a snap. Not everyone did. In an essay just two years ago, I described what the transition to peace would be like:

> Pity General Tommy Franks or, for that matter, any American military commander tasked with overseeing a post-Saddam Baghdad. For in that amorphous, dicey phase the Pentagon calls "war termination," . . . U.S. and allied forces liberating Iraq will attempt—more or less simultaneously—to end combat operations, cork public passions, disarm Iraqi battalions, bury the dead, generate electricity, pump potable water, bring law out of embittering lawlessness, empty jails of political prisoners, pack jails with criminals, turn armed partisans into peaceful citizens, re-arm local cops who were once enemy infantry, shoot terrorists, thwart chiselers, carpetbaggers, and black marketeers, fix sewers, feed refugees, patch potholes, get trash trucks rolling, and accomplish all this under the lidless gaze of Peter Jennings and Al Jazeera.

What I missed was the amount of money Saddam had squirreled away to keep the pot boiling and test U.S. will through time. Oil For Food and other scams gave the tyrant a bankroll. I expected al Qaeda or its avatars to show up in Iraq—in fact, that's one of the sotto voce goals for waging war in the heart of the Middle East, to fight Islamofascism on its home turf. Prior to 9/11, with little pressure on its hidden network, al Qaeda could take its time to spring a vicious surprise attack—surprise and visionary viciousness being its strengths and the gist of its "asymmetric" challenge to America's "symmetric" power. "Fear us, America," was the message, "because al Qaeda chooses the time and place of battle, and when we do you are defenseless."

The essence of strategic art is to force an enemy to fight on your terms, not his, and ideally in a fight he cannot refuse. The U.S.-led attack on Iraq changed al Qaeda's battlefield. Sunni-extremist al Qaeda has had to fight in a predominantly Shia country. Arab elitists in al Qaeda snubbed the Afghans and ticked them off; Kurds know the feeling.

Zarqawi's al Qaeda clan accepted the battle. Zarqawi's network has been hit and hit hard. We've learned a lot about al Qaeda funding and recruiting, but Zarqawi hasn't been destroyed. Something that has been destroyed is the notion that al Qaeda's extremism dominates Islam. The idea that waging jihad against the West is easy has also been exposed as a lie. These are ideological defeats for al Qaeda, but the Bush administration—soft-pedaling the ideological conflict—has failed to exploit them politically and psychologically.

The continuing combat in Iraq is thus not only the result of slapdash postwar planning, but of two strategic aims that will take years to mesh: (1) engage al Qaeda on a battlefield it did not choose in order to destroy its eschatological claims, and (2) plant a modern, secular Arab state in the Middle East that will ultimately seal al Qaeda's defeat. The Iraqi people remain in the crossfire of Saddamite resistance, al Qaeda terror, and Coalition firepower.

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What are the acceptable End States in Iraq? In an essay he wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* in August, Iraq's interim prime minister Iyad Allawi identified three keys to success in Iraq: (1) security and the rule of law, (2) a prosperous economy, and (3) an "inclusive, collaborative" political system. To achieve it will take years of low-level warfare and continuing security assistance from the United States even after the New Iraq begins to manage its own domestic security. No administration of whatever political stripe should think otherwise.

Another acceptable End State would be what a friend called "a too strong, bulldog Iraq." Don't dismiss the notion out of hand. Here are the attributes: "New Iraq" decides to rearm for offensive capability—and the French or Russians sell it weapons. Angry at perceived Syrian, Iranian, or Saudi interference, a brave new Iraqi government turns to regional assertiveness as a way of solidifying domestic support. The United States could live with this End State, but it would seriously frustrate attempts to spur political evolution in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

A far less acceptable End State would be a "gentle" dictatorship in Iraq, an authoritarian regime that did not threaten the region but held Iraq together by force and smashed civil opposition in the name of domestic security. This would be an ideological defeat for the United States, the defeat salved if this New Iraq were an effective counterterror partner in the region. Early Coalition withdrawal, whatever the reason, would make this End State more likely.

The last acceptable End State, but one that further frustrates long-term American goals, is the oft-debated tripartite Iraq, with Kurdistan in the north, Shia-stan in the south, and Baath-istan in the Sunni Triangle and Al Anbar Province. This would be a dangerous mosaic, but for the sake of oil revenues the Baathists would have to police al Qaeda. Kurds and Shia areas would also destroy al Qaedaites.

Defeatists and cynics will argue it's too late for the United States to wage the Millennium War on ideological grounds. This ignores the fact that this war is ideological in its deepest origins.

Afghanistan is the guide. Afghanistan's October 9 presidential election was the most significant election in 2004. Obviously, it was significant for the people of Afghanistan, but it was significant too for the forgotten, trampled, robbed, and oppressed people suffering in Earth's various tyrannies—those who do long for freedom's fairer shake. The successful election was also a major step toward victory for the civilized world. This Millennium War is as much a war against fear, poverty, and anarchy as it is a war against the petty tyrants who harbor and sustain terrorists. The 8 million Afghans who voted, despite terror threats from al Qaeda and Taliban holdouts, rejected fear. The Afghan people acted, ignoring death threats made by religious fascists, the destruction wrought by 30 years of war, and the lack of "a modern transportation and communication infrastructure" (i.e., roads and telephones).

The Afghan people understand that democracy and the rule of law are the keys to modernity as well as the foundations of a more just society, and they made a public statement about their own hopes for the future. It's a future where the governed have a legal voice. It's a future where the rule of law replaces the whim of the tyrant imposed by force. The Afghan vote exemplifies the "ballot" component of the U.S. global strategy of bullets, money, and ballots. The bullets are combat and security operations. The money is financial, reconstruction, and development aid. The ballot is shorthand for fostering consensus-based governmental institutions and reinforcing the rule of law.

The Afghan presidential election is another loud shout for freedom. The Afghan people, in astounding numbers, went to the polls when they were given the opportunity—the first time in history they had the chance.

Major Hoppman and I lag behind one of the British commandos in General Graham's personal security detachment. It's 1300 hours and heat bakes Babylon's walls. At least we don't have to wear our armor inside the ruins, which is some relief.

We pass one of Saddam's fake-Nebuchadnezzar bricks, and I point it out to John. "Snap a picture, sir?" he asks.

"Naw, let's catch up," I reply.

Then we pass a large, restored door, a portal. The portal perfectly frames the hill with Saddam's squat pleasure dome.

"This is a picture, Colonel Bay," John says.

With a broad sweep I pull my patrol cap off my head and point it toward the palace, like a carnival barker introducing a freak.

"Great shot sir. Do it again."

"I really think that place is hideous," I said. "Building it damaged the ruins. No way it didn't."

"It's sure there," John says.

I put my hat back on. "Yeah, so we deal with it, huh? I'll tell you something, though. When someone turns that palace into a luxury hotel, you'll know we're well on our way to victory." ♦

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The Struggle for the Middle East

Iraq, Iran, and the path to democracy

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

The Middle East has defined the first four years of George W. Bush's presidency. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the administration's evolving pro-democracy Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, and the downplaying of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation have overturned America's traditional approach to the region. Our European and Muslim allies in the Cold War, the transatlanticist foreign-policy establishment in the United States, and the Near Eastern cadres within the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency have all been dismayed—in the case of France, Germany, and certain quarters at Foggy Bottom and Langley, appalled—by the post-9/11 actions of President Bush.

But what should be the administration's Middle East project for the next four years? Post-Saddam Iraq is not a failure—as long as roughly 80 percent of Iraq's population is moving towards democratic governance, we're not failing. But it is certainly an awful mess. Clerical Iran, the *bête noire* of every administration since 1979, is advancing its nuclear-weapons programs and playing a favorite Middle Eastern parlor game—divide-and-frustrate the Westerners (the Europeans have enthusiastically abetted Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the clerical regime's major-domo and its most accomplished realpolitician). And even though Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda has so far failed to strike the United States again—a more severe visa policy towards Middle Eastern Muslim males has all by itself made tactical planning and operations inside the United States enormously difficult—Islamic holy-warriorism remains a ferocious menace. Muslim Americans have shown themselves highly resistant to violent Islamic extremism—if they had been as susceptible to bin Ladenism as European Muslims have been, we would likely have seen numerous attacks since 9/11 inside the United States. Young Muslim men could still, however, get infected by the ever-vibrant militancy coming from abroad. As long as bin Ladenism brews in the Middle East, the successful penetration of America's defenses remains an ever-terrifying possibility.

How is the administration going to deal with bin Ladenism in the Middle East? The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, the Bush administration's attempt to shatter the nexus between autocracy and Islamic extremism, could easily die an early death if it becomes only a program administered by the Near East Bureau of the State Department. The bureau has never liked the idea, seeing it as an annoying project advanced by naive pro-democracy hands at the National Security Council. The further we are from 9/11, the easier it is for some to view bin Ladenism as a pre-9/11 tactical threat, one sufficiently dealt with by enhanced domestic security and closer liaison relationships with the European and Middle Eastern intelligence and security services. (The "realist" camp—think Brent Scowcroft on the right, Zbigniew Brzezinski on the left—has more or less held this view since September 12, 2001.) Just a year ago, in November 2003, the president declared war on the status quo in the Middle East by announcing his new "forward strategy of freedom." So how can his administration advance the initiative so that it isn't feckless?

And should the Bush administration now become more engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation? The oldest, luckiest, and most influential terrorist, Yasser Arafat, is at long last dead. Some of his minions in the Palestine Liberation Organization seem in comparison more moderate. The Europeans, who view the Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio as the epicenter of Islamic militancy in the Middle East and among Europe's millions of Muslims, are desperate to see progress in the Holy Land. A sizable slice of Washington's foreign-policy establishment, and Muslim reformers abroad, share the European assessment of the global repercussions from Israeli-Palestinian

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troubles. They would love to see the United States again more engaged. A resumption of the "peace process" would help our embattled friend, British prime minister Tony Blair, America's staunchest European ally, who is perpetually torn between America and his French and German "partners." So should the Bush administration abandon its restrained, wait-and-see approach to the evolution of Palestinian politics and pressure Israel again to make concessions to nurture Palestinian moderates?

* * *

Let's take the above issues in order of importance. Iraq comes first. Senior officials, particularly within the Pentagon, ought now to be waking up each morning and telling themselves that the United States may well lose in Iraq in the next 6 to 12 months unless serious course corrections are made. And if the United States loses in Iraq, the repercussions will seriously weaken America everywhere. If we lose in Iraq, neoisolationism in both the Republican and Democratic parties—the disposition is actually stronger on the left than on the right—will in all probability skyrocket. And if such a retreat could be catastrophic for the West—bin Ladenism and other nefarious forces in the Middle East would be supercharged; Beijing might make a play to squash once and for all democratic Taiwan—then failure in Iraq could conceivably define the post-Cold War world, replacing 9/11 as the signal event of our era.

Getty Images / Muhannad Fala'ah

Baghdad, December 1: The newspaper ad encourages participation in the coming elections.

The Bush administration ought to admit to itself two obvious facts. First, we are losing the "war of the roads" in Iraq. If the Sunni insurgency controls the principal arteries in and out of Baghdad and can kill with ease on major thoroughfares elsewhere, there is no way the United States and its Iraqi allies can win a counterinsurgency campaign in the country's heartland.

The administration really should not use here the refrain, of which it is becoming ever more fond, that "only Iraqis can secure their country." Clearing the roads adequately, which means suppressing the occasional bombings, brigandage, and assassinations, really has nothing to do with "standing up" Iraqi security forces. If there is one kind of military operation that does not require much local knowledge, it's undertaking roadblocks, observation posts, and ground and air patrols. The military personnel required to perform this function 24/7 isn't small, but it is certainly within the capabilities of forces already present in Iraq if the Pentagon so chose to allocate these resources. It beggars the mind to believe that the U.S. military cannot deploy sufficient forces to secure the highway between Baghdad and the capital's international airport. Insurgents and brigands—it's very difficult often to tell the difference—now *own* this short stretch of highway, which regularly sees ordinary Iraqis robbed and shot, often in carefree, outrageous ways. What is worse, official Americans, authorized contractors, and the few lucky Iraqis who have the right friends can chopper overhead, traveling the same route in relative security. (That is, until the Iraqi

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insurgents and their foreign supporters, emboldened by their success and the failure of the Americans to counter them more aggressively, start using better ground-to-air weaponry.)

Anyone who has spent any time at all with Iraqis—be they Arab Sunni, Arab Shiite, Kurd, pro- or anti-American—knows that the vast majority of Iraqis have wanted to see many more U.S. military checkpoints and patrols on the highways. As the insurgency has warped into constant street crime and hostage-taking, a gut-level bitterness towards Americans, who seemed omnipotent after the downing of Saddam, has surged. It is a surreal experience to listen to the Iraqi Sunni elite, "vacationing" in Amman, Jordan, castigate the Americans for their failure to provide basic street security while simultaneously expressing the hope that their Sunni Arab brethren, both foreign and domestic, blow the Americans and their "Shiite sympathizers" out of Iraq.

It is certainly true that many Iraqis—many very pro-American Iraqis—are indignant about the careless use of American firepower when insurgents strike and Americans respond. The U.S. Army is a stunningly powerful machine, and the spooky nature of combat in Iraq—you never know when you will get hit, and combatants and noncombatants are often indistinguishable—naturally inclines U.S. soldiers to view all Iraqis with suspicion. The military brass and their civilian bosses deserve praise for understanding the risks of deploying too much power in this counterinsurgency. And the ethic of force protection—probably the strongest ethic in the U.S. military—is reflective of America's larger familial sensibilities.

But we have reached a point in Iraq where our first priority must be to guarantee Iraqis—not Americans—a minimum of security on the major highways. A greater American presence and firepower on the roads could kill more innocent Iraqis. The American death toll could climb. Yet it is an excellent bet that most Iraqis would be willing to absorb the losses provided they can see improvement in their daily security. If we do not do this, and do it fairly quickly, we are likely to damage irreparably moderate political forces in the country, especially within the Sunni heartlands, as we and our allies occupy ever smaller, disconnected, fortified oases surrounded by insurgents, their sympathizers, and a fearful population who know better than to cast their lot with men who only fly above them.

At this late date before the January 30 elections, there is probably no more effective and essential campaign for the U.S. military than securing the roads. Start with the highway to the airport, and then go after the roads from the capital south to the Shiite heartlands. The Shiites need to see that we are serious about maintaining their security and the flow of pilgrims from the capital to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Everybody else—but most importantly neighboring Sunni Arab countries that may be ever more inclined to aid militarily their brethren who are fighting "American occupation" and Shiite (read "Iranian") domination—needs to see that the United States can protect one short airport highway that connects Iraq to the outside world.

Second obvious fact: The government of Ayad Allawi has failed. It is possible that Allawi and his list of candidates will do well enough in the January 30 elections to remain a force in Iraqi politics. The power of incumbency—the *qa'id* factor of Arab politics—is real, even in Iraq where the status quo isn't an electoral strength. The United States will, however, be enormously fortunate—even though many within the American government, particularly within the State Department and the Clandestine Service of the CIA, strenuously argue the opposite—if Allawi flames out in the elections, and the "Shiite list" backed by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Iraq's preeminent divine, the rabble-rouser Moktada al-Sadr, and Ahmad Chalabi proves overwhelmingly triumphant.

A different approach to the Sunni insurgency needs to be tried, and only an official realignment of Iraq's politics, where the majority actually has some official presence and power, is likely to encourage the Bush administration and the Allawi government, which will remain in office until a new constitution is approved, to change course. Interim Prime Minister Allawi came into office promising "outreach" to the Arab Sunnis who'd backed the Baath party and Saddam Hussein. He put forth an enormous gamble: You join me in building a new Iraq, and I will promise you a serious place within the new bureaucracy, especially within the army and the security services, the traditional levers of Sunni Arab power. Allawi did not betray the democratic objectives of a new Iraq, but he certainly intimated to the "exiled" Arab Sunnis that through him they would get a position in government that would be difficult for a democratically elected government to reverse.

Unfortunately for Allawi, and Iraq, the Sunni Arabs have not played according to this plan. What Allawi has in fact done is introduce into the fledgling Iraqi government Baathist and Sunni fundamentalist moles.

We regularly hear the U.S military say that their sources of information on the insurgents are getting better. This may well be true. It certainly appears, however, that the insurgents' information, organization, and effectiveness are improving faster than our ability to neutralize them. One fears that the new Iraqi security and intelli-

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gence services are so thoroughly penetrated that it is questionable whether American cooperation with these organizations can ever be operationally secure. Allawi's bureaucratic gambit has had adverse repercussions beyond the tactics of counterinsurgency. Odds are it has emboldened the Sunni insurgents in the field. It has certainly emboldened the Sunni Arab elite one finds in Jordan (the case is no doubt similar in Syria), who have probably played an important, perhaps essential, role in developing the cohesion and effectiveness of the insurgency. One shudders contemplating the disaster we would have faced had the Coalition Provisional Authority actually maintained and incorporated more of the Sunni Arab military elite from Saddam's armed forces into the "new" Iraqi armed forces.

Getty Images / Muhannad Fala'ah

An election worker marks the results of a lottery deciding the order in which parties appear on the Iraqi ballot.

Though it is impossible to dissect precisely the Sunni Arab mentality that has fueled the insurgency, it's not too hard to see the two most influential mind-sets. One is that of the antidemocratic sectarian, who has used violence as a means of "negotiating" a future political position that a one man, one vote democracy would deny. These Sunni Arabs essentially want to create a pre-1970s Lebanon model in Iraq, where the Sunni community enjoys power, prestige, and wealth beyond what its numbers, accomplishments, and economic capacity warrant. These folks are the "pragmatists" among the Sunni Arab insurgents, since it is just possible to imagine them working out some deal with the Shiites and Kurds. Any workable deal would leave them vastly weaker than they were under Saddam, but this group just might compromise since their attachment to Iraq is sufficiently mundane—family, friends, property—that they would not want to risk losing it completely. Prime Minister Allawi gambled that these "pragmatists" were a decisive majority among the Arab Sunni elite and among the insurgents actually fighting.

The second mind-set is that of the Arab Sunni supremacist. These folks can be either Baathists or religious fundamentalists. They would rather be dead, or live permanently in exile, than accept an Iraqi state where Arab Shiites and Kurds rule. Rhetorically, if not financially, this group receives more support from the Sunni Arab world, which likes to depict these diehards as Iraq's finest patriots. Allawi gambled that the "pragmatists" would sell out the "supremacists."

None of the prime minister's bets has paid off because the lines between the "pragmatists" and the "supremacists" are often blurred, ideologically and familially. Also the itch to try violence as a means to win, not just draw or place, has been greater than what Allawi apparently expected. And once the violence starts, it's hard to stop. An emotional chain reaction sets in that further clouds the difference between "pragmatists" and "supremacists."

Where do we go from here? In all probability, we're stuck with Allawi's "deal" unless the January 30 elections can somehow change the dynamic and tactics. This could happen. A substantial Sunni vote in the January 30 elections would gut the legitimacy the insurgents are vying for inside Iraq and elsewhere in the Arab world. The Sunni Arab elite who have either sided with the insurgents or are sitting "neutral" on the sidelines would get a loud wake-up call that they have misjudged the flock. If the Sunni Arabs vote in the elections, or, more important, if they abstain en masse, Allawi may see the light (he no doubt will see it before the CIA does), and start intimidating, not negotiating with, the "pragmatists."

Allawi and the Americans ought to make it perfectly clear that the Shia are coming (after the elections, even the diehard Sunnis may begin to appreciate the writing on the wall) and the Arab Sunni elite has at most a year to join the new Iraq. In the meantime, he and the Americans (and

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if not he, then the Americans) should talk openly and regularly about how the new Iraqi army will be overwhelmingly Shiite and Kurdish since the Sunni Arabs have given them no choice. We have to ratchet up the pressure on the Arab Sunni community, especially on its elite, while prominent Iraqi Shiites—real ones, not the Allawi, ex-Baathist look-alikes—appeal to the Sunnis behind the scenes to join the new nation. The Sunni Arabs have to know—they have to feel it in their bones—that they are on the verge of losing everything in Iraq. Allawi's grand gambit has done the opposite: It has produced self-confident, smiling faces among men who are actually enjoying the war (often safely ensconced in fine hotels in neighboring Arab states).

In the end, the Sunnis will not win a civil war. Inevitably the Iraqi Shia, diehard nationalists who will not long tolerate Sunni terrorist bombing campaigns in the South, will militarily organize themselves to defeat the Sunnis on their own turf. But their victory would likely be ferocious. Latent Shiite anger over decades of brutal Sunni oppression would probably come to the fore, empowering the most radical and cold-hearted among the Shiites. The democratic experiment and its most influential proponent, the moderate Shiite religious establishment, would both likely collapse amid the violence. The creation of an Iranian-aided Iraqi Hezbollah would become a distinct possibility. If the most radical and dictatorial came to the fore among both Sunni and Shiite Arabs, the Kurds would sensibly conclude that any association with Arab Iraqis was unhealthy. The de facto separation of Kurdistan could become de jure. Jordan and Saudi Arabia, two staunchly Sunni anti-Shiite states, could start throwing weaponry and money at any Sunni group that can shoot. A very ugly outcome.

* * *

And then there is Iran—as if Iraq weren't enough. The Islamic Republic's pursuit of atomic weapons—and only the deaf, dumb, blind, and the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency officials (when speaking publicly) don't know that the clerical regime is energetically pursuing a nuclear-weapons program—is getting ever closer to the finish line. Whether you believe the prognostications of the Israelis or of the French foreign intelligence service, both of which think that a nuke is near, or those of the Americans, who generally guestimate a bomb in three to five years, a nuclear weapon under the control of Ali Khamenei, Iran's clerical head, and Hashemi Rafsanjani, the regime's number two and probably the cleric most intimately associated with Tehran's two-decade-old drive to produce fission weapons, is just over the horizon unless somebody in the West can delay it.

President Bush personally has described Iran's nuclear-weapons aspirations as "unacceptable" to the United States. He has thrown his administration behind the French-British-German effort to use diplomacy to convince Tehran to forsake its uranium enrichment efforts, even though the conduct of the Europeans has convinced an increasing number of American officials that this soft-power approach has no chance of succeeding with a regime that has been lying about its intentions for nearly 20 years. The Europeans have so far adamantly refused to consider serious economic sanctions against the mullahs. In particular, France, which has probably had the best intelligence collection against the Iranian nuclear target among the Europeans, has clearly signaled that it wants to expand, not curtail, trade. France's largest automotive company, Renault, in which the French government is an influential minority shareholder, has signed an agreement with Tehran to build factories in Iran for export to the entire Middle East and Central Asia.

And it is an open question, of course, whether any combination of sanctions, short of a blockade of Iranian oil, could convince the ruling mullahs to cease and desist since the nuclear program is one of the few things that the quarrelsome political clergy can agree on. It is also undoubtedly popular with many ordinary Iranians, who see the nuke as an expression of Iranian nationalism, not as an instrument of mass destruction in the hands of virulently anti-American clerics. The mullahs, who have alienated just about everyone in the country with their incompetence, corruption, and antidemocratic behavior, have accidentally discovered something that gives them prestige and nationalist credentials. (Secretive and mendacious, the ruling divines owe a thank you to the virulently anti-regime group the Mujahedeen Khalq for originally exposing the nuclear program's dimensions and progress to the Iranian public.)

Which brings us to the crucial question: What can the administration do?

There are four options:

One. Admit defeat, play along with the Europeans, and learn to love the clerical nuclear weapon. Of course, President Bush and Vice President Cheney would have to eat their words about an Iranian nuclear menace, abandon preemption, the Axis of Evil doctrine, and the entire counterterrorist approach since 9/11. They would also have to cross their fingers that a regime addicted to both terrorism as statecraft and anti-Americanism wouldn't ever use its nuclear-weapons technology against the United States or an ally, directly or indirectly via surrogate Islamic radicals. In particular, the Bush administration

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would need to forget the disconcerting contacts—see the 9/11 Commission report—between members of al Qaeda and the clerical regime. Democratic senator Joseph Biden could be helpful as a model in this regard, as he always tries to refer to the members of al Qaeda in Iran as "in custody," which is exactly how the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes them.

Two. Try to force a vote on the U.N. Security Council finding Iran not in full compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and thereby subject to sanctions. This tactic won't work since neither the Europeans, nor the Russians, nor the Chinese would likely go along. This maneuver might make sense as a preliminary to a preemptive military strike, allowing Washington to say that it tried. However, since the Europeans are never going to state publicly what they regularly say privately—that the Iranians are determined to acquire, at minimum, the means of quickly producing a nuclear weapon—the rhetorical and moral advantage of going to the U.N. seems nil.

Three. Tell the Europeans in crystal-clear language that the United States intends to strike preemptively clerical Iran's nuclear-related facilities unless they insist to the Iranians that Western inspectors must be allowed immediate free access to any challenged site in Iran. Tell the Europeans to tell the Iranians what Washington said to them. (U.S. surveillance satellites should be trained on Iran to watch for telltale movement and communications.) This approach might possibly work, but it's doubtful. Either the Europeans or the Iranians will probably refuse (the Iranians are vastly better than the French, Germans, and Brits at brinkmanship).

Four. Realize that the only option that passes the pinch test—that realistically offers a good chance of delaying Iran's nuclear-weapons production by years—is a preemptive military strike against all of the facilities that American, European, Israeli, and (in private) IAEA intelligence suspect are associated with weapons production. There are certainly many arguments to be made against a preemptive attack, though only one is really free from a pre-9/11 mindset that advances defense over offense in counterterrorism. The weak arguments—the Iranian nation will rise against us, the democratic movement in Iran will die, the Iranian clergy will retaliate in Iraq and globally—are not historically or psychologically particularly compelling. Iranians as a people may well rally around the flag, but so what? The Iranians rallied around the flag when Saddam Hussein invaded in 1980. The invasion didn't prevent the spiritual collapse of the Islamic revolution and the growing popular animus towards the ruling clergy, which were both well underway by the mid-1980s.

Iranians are not nationalist automatons—they are among the most profound, cynical patriots imaginable. They have learned to hate the clerical regime for the most intimate, in-your-face reasons. This disgust will not be long buried by a rush of patriotic passion provoked by an American bombing run on nuclear facilities. Given the Iranian character, it's likely to dissipate at an astonishing speed.

And even if the Iranians were to prove themselves nationalist zealots—there is a first time for everything—history is littered with determined nationalists who lose in battles against stronger powers. And the current Iranian government has already stifled the democratic movement in the country. The democratic culture in Iran is certainly alive and growing. But it's absurdly American-centric to believe that Iranians are embracing democratic ideas because of a love of the United States. Iranians are increasingly democratic in spirit because of their own collision with various types of dictatorship over the last hundred years. Some of Iran's most determined and popular democratic dissidents already have a very jaundiced view of the United States. After a U.S. strike, they would just like us even less.

What a preemptive attack would certainly do is provoke *another* debate about the competence of a ruling clergy who led the nation into a head-on collision with the United States. Khamenei and Rafsanjani, and the Revolutionary Guard Corps behind them, would not look so clever or so unchallengeably strong the day after U.S. missiles and planes destroyed the nuclear facilities. The clerical regime might well try to retaliate against the United States clandestinely. It rose to power in large measure on deceit and a willingness to use intimidation, ruthless violence, and terrorism against its opponents (which is, of course, why you don't want them to have a nuke).

But the fear-of-terrorism argument takes us back to the pre-9/11 world, where we preempted ourselves because of our fear of our enemies' potential nastiness. This argument is similar in sentiment and ethics to those used by European states that gave laissez-passers to Palestinian terrorists so long as the Palestinians agreed not to kill Israelis and Jews on their soil. The logic of this argument will always cede the high ground to an enemy willing to use terrorism against us (and the mullahs have certainly proven over two decades that they are willing to use terrorism against us and others). The only responsible rejoinder here is to threaten your enemy with massive retaliation, aimed directly at the world he cherishes, and especially at the military and security-and-intelligence structures that guarantee his survival. If we want to stop Iran's terrorist-supporting clerics from

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getting nukes, we have to be prepared to stare them down.

And, yes, the Iranians could try also to strike us in Iraq, but they are on operationally weak ground in Mesopotamia. Iraqi Shiite interests differ starkly from clerical Iran's. The Iraqi Shia as a people and the major Shiite groups through which Iran has tried to work its influence have pledged themselves to creating a democracy. It is enormously unlikely that the Iraqi Shia will abandon a peaceful path to democracy and engage in terrorism against the United States for the sake of a Persian clerical regime that most Iraqi Arabs dislike and don't trust. And Iranians must have secure Iraqi operational partners: If they operate alone, they stand out and run the serious risk that their hand will be discovered. If discovered, the clerics' fear of massive American retaliation against the regime comes into play.

The stronger argument against attacking Iran's nuclear-weapons facilities is that we may not technically be able to do it. This point needs to be debated by military men, intelligence officers, and senior officials. Given how diligently Iran has tried to hide certain facilities and deny access to others, the evidence certainly suggests that the clerical regime's research and production may not allow for that much duplication and concealment. The American, European, and Israeli intelligence communities have a good deal of information on a wide variety of likely and possible sites. Quite unintentionally, the IAEA has also aided in what is becoming a targeting guide. And given the awful terrorist track record of the clerical regime toward us and others, it would be wise for the administration—assuming it wants to pass the pinch test and not continually punt to the Europeans—to posit that we can severely hurt the Iranian nuclear-weapons program until proven otherwise.

* * *

Which leaves us with al Qaeda, the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, and the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. The first two are completely intertwined. The Middle East initiative is the Bush administration's attempt to get to the root causes behind al Qaeda: the nexus between Islamic extremism and tyranny. Building on the intellectual spadework done by such influential historians as Princeton University's Bernard Lewis and Johns Hopkins University's Fouad Ajami, President Bush has underscored American-supported Middle Eastern autocracy as the jet fuel behind Islamic holy-warriorism. The Broader Middle East Initiative is supposed to encourage the political opening of Middle Eastern societies. Yet as of now, the initiative contains no coercive measures for encouraging dictators and kings to loosen their grips on their societies. In the State Department's view, this evolution is all supposed to happen voluntarily.

There is no historical reason to believe that it will. The Middle East's unelected rulers have shown no inclination whatsoever to off themselves. On the contrary, they have shown repeatedly that they are willing to intimidate, jail, or eliminate serious regime-threatening dissident movements. Still, things are changing in the Muslim Middle East, particularly in the Arab world. In great part owing to President Bush's post-9/11 actions, reformers are trying to gain some public ground and even, in some countries, toeholds inside governments. These efforts reflect a general consensus in the Middle East, among both the man in the street and the elites, that the status quo is unsustainable, that something must give in the Middle East's politically dysfunctional societies. Travel the Middle East and it's easy to find people who feel that just maybe, for a variety of interlocking reasons, despotism in the region is now on shaky ground. Which is why if the Bush administration is serious about its own analysis and intentions it will start to pressure the only two governments over which it has any real leverage—Egypt and Jordan.

Egypt is the make-or-break country in the Arab world. If Egypt were to go democratic, the political impact on the Arab world would be even greater than the likely shockwave that will come from Iraq if the democratic experiment there can hold. Along with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Egypt is the birthplace of the jihadist spirit of 9/11. Highly Westernized, urban, and urbane, Egypt is rich in wannabe political parties, particularly those of a religious stripe. If the president's counterterrorist democracy project makes sense in the Middle East—and it is certain that this president believes passionately that it does (a good example of a man who knows virtually nothing about the Middle East knowing more than many "realist" foreign-service and intelligence officials who've dedicated their lives to the region)—then his administration needs to prove that the Broader Middle East Initiative is more than just ideological window dressing. It should attach pro-democracy conditionalities to American aid.

For example, give Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, or whoever succeeds him (he is old and in spotty health), a three-year deadline to implement a real democratic transition. Link the billions in U.S. aid to political achievements. Marry the aid to regular public statements about the need for the people of Egypt to determine their own destiny. (To his credit, President Bush has already rocked the Egyptian dictator once by a speech that singled out Egypt as a dictatorship that needed to evolve.)

Will Mubarak or his eldest son, who may be his suc-

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cessor, go for it? Probably not. But the United States needs to align itself finally on the democratic side in the Muslim Middle East. In no small part, bin Ladenism arose because the United States was constantly aligning itself with oppressive dictators, an understandable by-product of the Cold War. We should be enormously wary of any claim made by the U.S. intelligence community that support for this dictator or that king is essential to the war on terrorism. Eventually, we have to stop putting the cart before the horse. There is no historical reason to believe that bin Ladenism will end until the Middle East's autocracies evolve—until liberals, Muslim moderates, and fundamentalists have a chance to make their case democratically.

And intelligence services love to say their liaison work is essential to national security. Upon review, one usually discovers that it isn't quite as essential as the intel officers said, and that the regime in question isn't giving information to us because they like us. Fear of common enemies or more powerful "friends," possible punishment and reward, have much more to do with the liaison relationships. We cannot win this war through police actions. As a bureaucratically astute National Security Council official recently remarked, we should use our intelligence and security-service relationships to encourage these foreign intelligence and security services to evolve. Middle Eastern security services will have to crack—their loyalties and esprit de corps must become more popularly based—to have democratic movements triumph, at least without bloodshed. In both Egypt and especially Jordan, many within the political elites say they want change, that they have to change, sooner not later. Put them to the test. Give them an incentive to get serious.

And democratic change in Jordan, where over half the citizenry identifies itself as Palestinian (the percentage is even higher if one counts long-term Palestinian "refugees"), could have an enormous positive impact upon the Palestinian community on the West Bank of the Jordan river. No one talks about what democracy would do among East Bank Palestinians. They should. The identities of the denizens of both banks may meld. They may further separate. They will definitely provoke each other, fueling a profound debate about what it means to be Palestinian. To the Bush administration's credit, it seems to understand well that the key to any successful Israeli-Palestinian dialogue is the democratic evolution of the Palestinian people on the West Bank and in Gaza (it should add on the East Bank). The Palestinians must show that they have divorced themselves from decades of imbibing terrorism ("armed resistance") as the core of their national identity. This may be a long and painful process even in a democratic Palestinian society. Neither the Israeli Left nor Right wants to go back to the summer of 2000, when many Israelis, perhaps even a majority, had hoped that Israeli concessions were the key to producing a lasting peace. Suicide bombings have killed off that dream and transformed the Labor party into a vastly more skeptical enterprise.

Ariel Sharon is popular in Israel because the Palestinian national movement, led by the Palestine Liberation Organization, waged war on the Israeli liberal imagination. That imagination isn't dead, but it is circumscribed by the security barrier across the West Bank. The "Wall" has cut the Palestinian suicide-bombing success rate by 90 percent, and returned something close to normalcy to the Israeli psyche. A renewed "peace process" begins with that barrier: It ain't going anywhere. (Indeed, it can only grow in length and size.) And no American government post-9/11 is going to force the democratically elected government of Israel to move it, not before the Palestinian people have proven beyond doubt that they have gone cold-turkey on terrorism. It is in fact the "Wall," not Arafat's death, that is the real catalyst for change among West Bank Palestinians.

One has to assume that Tony Blair, a pretty keen observer of the American scene, knows this. Yet American coercion of the Israelis is the sine qua non, as any European will tell you, of "progress" in the Holy Land. The British prime minister apparently believes that American coercion of Israelis might again be possible through an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. It isn't. The repercussions of such a conference, where it is certain that the French and perhaps other Western Europeans would behave poorly, could not redound to the prime minister's advantage in Washington, Jerusalem, Paris, Berlin, or London. The Bush administration would do Prime Minister Blair an enormous favor by telling him so. A revolutionary among the organically conservative and timid French and Germans, Blair ought to push with President Bush for meaningful Palestinian democracy, where all Palestinians, not just the old guard of the PLO, have a real chance for power. And George Bush perhaps could remind Tony Blair, who could remind the French and Germans, that bin Ladenism went from infancy to adulthood during the presidency of Bill Clinton, who was addicted to advancing the nationalist and religious aspirations of the Palestinian people by negotiation. (Remember those halcyon years!)

Of course, no discussion about any of the Middle East's problems between the president and the prime minister, Middle Eastern Muslims' two finest Western friends, is going to mean much unless the two gentlemen get it right in Iraq. If we lose there, it's all over. In our awful fall, even the French, smilingly, might pity us. ♦

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Murdering History

How the past became fair game for detective stories

By Jon L. Breen

Chaucer on his horse. Bettmann / CORBIS.

The line between fact and fancy has always been blurred in tabloid newspapers, plays and movies "*based on a true story*," biographies for schoolchildren, television commercials, political-campaign material, and other sources of popular entertainment. But in recent years the confusion has spread even to reputably published novels for adults. Consider, for example, the growing fictional practice of making detectives of historical celebrities.

In a small way, the phenomenon has been around for sixty years (or even longer, if you count the nineteenth-century fictionalized exploits of such real-life investigators as Vidocq and Allan Pinkerton). The first author to write a detective series about a historical personage was probably Lillian de la Torre, who cast Dr. Samuel Johnson in the Sherlock Holmes role, with James Boswell as his Watson, for a 1943 short story in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. First collected in book form in *Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector* (1946), the series would eventually fill four volumes.

Frederic Dannay, the editorial half of the Ellery Queen team, liked the idea. After publishing mysteries featuring Charlemagne, King Arthur, and Socrates, he discovered and nurtured the versatile Theodore Mathieson, who, beginning in 1959, made one-shot detectives of Leonardo da Vinci, Alexander the Great, Omar Khayyam, Hernando Cortez, Don Miguel de Cervantes, Daniel Defoe, Captain Cook, Dan'l Boone, Stanley and Livingstone, and Florence Nightingale. Mathieson followed his collected stories, *The Great "Detectives"* (1960), with one of the first novel-length examples, *The Devil and Ben Franklin* (1961).

Still, as recently as the 1970s, the practice was rare, involving only stray volumes like John Dickson Carr's final novel *The Hungry Goblin* (1972), with Wilkie Collins as detective, and Margaret Doody's *Aristotle Detective* (1978).

Then came the deluge. The ranks have included some whose real-life roles made them plausible sleuths—British magistrate Sir John Fielding, Al Capone's nemesis Eliot Ness, onetime New York police commissioner Theodore Roosevelt—while others were more unlikely: Queen Elizabeth I; Edward VII while he was prince of Wales; First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt; and such entertainers as Groucho Marx, the team of Enrico Caruso and Geraldine Farrar (she being the brighter one), and Elvis Presley.

Most of the subjects have been writers, usually but not always those associated with fictional crime. The appearances in detective fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle, who actually had some experience investigating real-life mysteries, have varied from the young medical student playing Watson to his mentor Dr. Joseph Bell (the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes) to the latter-day apologist for spiritualism, often in tandem with Houdini, the debunker of spiritualist frauds rather than the believer. Dashiell Hammett, once a Pinkerton operative, was a natural as a

The author, most recently, of Kill the Umpire: The Calls of Ed Gorgon, *Jon L. Breen is winner of two Edgar awards.*

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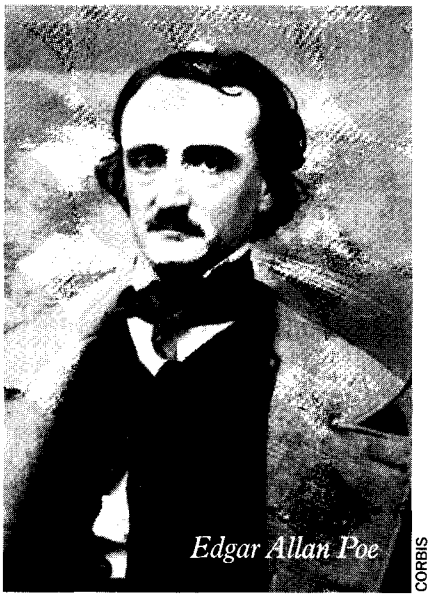
Charles Dickens

fictional sleuth. Also detecting have been writers outside or on the periphery of the field, including Mark Twain, Jack London, and Jane Austen.

Among recent entries, there's Philippa Morgan's first novel, *Chaucer and the House of Fame*, about Geoffrey Chaucer on a 1370 mission to France for his patron John of Gaunt. The Comte de Guyac, whose loyalty to the English king Chaucer seeks to clarify, is colorfully murdered in the course of a boar hunt. Chaucer's diplomatic profession makes him at least marginally credible as a detective, and Morgan spins a neat mystery plot. Chaucer has yet to write *Canterbury Tales*, and he gets the inspiration for the Miller's Tale in the course of his adventures. Some readers may question the decision to insert modern idioms into the dialogue, but given that Chaucer and his contemporaries spoke nothing like we do now, Morgan manages to make them sound natural while avoiding the most jarring anachronisms. She includes no historical notes, but her knowledge of the poet and his time is convincing.

The one unpublished effort in Theodore Mathieson's series featured Shakespeare, who narrated his case in the first person. Editor Queen wrote, "Imagine a pure detective story written by Shakespeare himself—in authentic Shakespearean language! It is no discredit to Mr. Mathieson that this incredibly daring attempt failed." The first-person Shakespeare of Leonard Tourney's *Time's Fool* might have attained Fred Dannay's editorial approval. Tourney, a longtime academic specialist in Shakespeare and his time, previously wrote eight Elizabethan-period mysteries about the husband and wife sleuthing team of Matthew and Joan Stock, who make a brief cameo appearance (though unnamed) in his new book. Tourney's complex Shakespeare displays no false modesty about his talents, bears the weight of grief over the death of his only son, rationalizes his double life as London party animal and Stratford husband and father, and often depicts himself in an unheroic light. The story begins in December 1603, when the prosperous Will is summoned to a meeting with the dark lady of his sonnets, now afflicted with the pox, who attempts to extort money from him. The novel is adequate as a mystery but more distinguished in its command of period style and detail. True, Will and the other characters are awfully eloquent in their everyday speech, but wouldn't Shakespeare have rewritten it that way had he recounted his experiences in the then-unknown genre of a detective novel?

Harold Schechter also dares to have his subject narrate in the first person in his third novel about Edgar Allan Poe, who invented the detective story and provided a fictional solution to a real-life murder in "The Mystery of Marie Roget." *The Mask of the Red Death* gives us Eddie Poe, action hero, and plays the character largely (though not entirely) for laughs. The novel begins with the editor of the *Broadway Journal* considering the uninspiring review copies before him and bemoaning the lowly state of serious literature in 1840s New York. Every reference to the literary works of others comes with a sting in the tail. At one point, Poe responds with ostensible modesty to an admirer of "The Raven," in an everyday speaking style as ornate as his prose: "You are altogether too kind. . . . Both Shakespeare and Milton, after all, produced several works which—while


Edgar Allan Poe

CORBIS

not necessarily *surpassing* my poem in sheer originality of conception—may certainly be considered its near equal."

Comic egotism aside, Poe emerges as sympathetic, likable, and personally responsible, with his alcoholism under control. Other real-life characters appearing in *The Mask of the Red Death* reflect their public images: P.T. Barnum speaks in advertising copy for his American Museum, and Kit Carson is every bit the larger-than-life hero of the dime novels. Poe joins Carson's hunt for the mountain man, "Liver-Eating" Johnson, whose scalping proclivities are on display in a gruesome series of Manhattan murders. The whodunit part of the plot falls prey to a pitfall of mysteries featuring historical subjects: a shortage of fictional suspects to choose from. Some of the plot turns will elicit groans, but the background is fascinating and the language (apart from a sore-thumb appearance of the modern atrocity "as of yet") on the button.

Charles Dickens was intrigued by police work, and some of his novels border on detective fiction. Most of the stories in the recent anthology *Death by Dickens* put his fictional characters in original mysteries, but two present the man himself as sleuth. In Martin Edwards's "The House of the Red Candle," Dickens, in the company of drinking buddy and fellow novelist

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Wilkie Collins, solves the locked-room murder of a prostitute's customer in a shabby Greenwich bordello. The characters and the sordid atmosphere are nicely done, but the mystery is simplistic and easily seen through by the alert reader. In Peter Tremayne's "The Passing Shadow," an older Dickens, in the company of son-in-law Charles Collins (Wilkie's brother), is asked to investigate an unidentified body pulled from the Thames, resulting in a trumped-up "origins" story for both Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*.

San Francisco *Examiner* journalist Ambrose Bierce has as his excuse for becoming a fictional detective his employer William Randolph Hearst, who encourages investigation in competition with the official police. The title of Oakley Hall's *Ambrose Bierce and the Trey of Pearls*, his fourth novel about the quotably cynical author of *The Devil's Dictionary*, refers to a trio of women's suffrage activists in the San Francisco of 1892. The narrator, Bierce's colleague Tom Redmond, seeks carnal knowledge of his cousin, the member of the trio who advocates Free Love. The mystery, involving the murder of a philandering minister, turns on a clue that is fair at least to the linguistically knowledgeable reader. Hall came to mystery fiction with a mainstream literary reputation, and his prose is finely honed—on the scene of a suffrage parade, we read, "two mules stood in their mulish dejection with no gender to celebrate."

In the world of Beatrix Potter, those mules would have had plenty to say. The creator of Peter Rabbit may have the least excuse of this group to be a fictional detective, but she fits right in with the self-sufficient heroines of contemporary amateur-detective cozies. In Susan Wittig Albert's *The Tale of Hill Top Farm*, Potter comes to England's Lake District, where she has purchased the titular farm and stays to solve possible murder and lesser crimes. While I normally draw the line at talking animals in an adult mystery, in this context they seem unavoidable. The author, who writes a series of Victorian mysteries with husband Bill Albert under the pseudonym Robin Paige, is one of the most scrupulous in separating fact from fiction, including a character list that asterisks the real people (and pets) in the novel, along with a concluding historical note and bibliography, a glossary of slang, and (this is a cozy after all) a selection of recipes. There is much charm to the writing and background, but the mystery plot is exceedingly thin, suggesting Albert was merely using the genre as an excuse to write about Potter.

Of all the writers of historical mystery fiction, Max Allan Collins has the highest ratio of real people to invented characters. In his Nate Heller private eye series, which is systematically addressing virtually every real-life mystery of the twentieth century, only the detective Heller himself is fictitious. Collins's knack for making real people come to life in fiction is a rarer gift and a trickier task than it sounds. His paperback-original "disaster" series puts popular writers in the role of detective: Jacques Futrelle (who really did go down with the ship) in *The Titanic Murders*; Leslie Charteris in *The Hindenburg Murders*; Edgar Rice Burroughs in *The Pearl Harbor Murders*; and Willard Huntington Wright (aka S.S. Van Dine, the creator of Philo Vance) in *The Lusitania Murders*.

Chaucer and the House of Fame
by Philippa Morgan
Carroll & Graf, 341 pp., $25

Time's Fool
A Mystery of Shakespeare
by Leonard Tourney
Forge, 320 pp., $24.95

The Mask of the Red Death
by Harold Schechter
Ballantine, 308 pp., $24.95

Death by Dickens
edited by Anne Perry
Berkley, 320 pp., $6.99

Ambrose Bierce and the Trey of Pearls
by Oakley Hall
Viking, 216 pp., $24.95

The Tale of Hill Top Farm
by Susan Wittig Albert
Berkley, 286 pp., $22.95

The London Blitz Murders
by Max Allan Collins
Berkley, 260 pp., $6.99

Beatrix Potter
Getty

I was especially impressed with *The London Blitz Murders*, in which Agatha Christie is the sleuth and Collins manages to plug a real-life crime into her style of classical detection. But when I passed it along with a recommendation, I got a surprising reaction from another reader who just didn't buy it. Would Agatha Christie at that time have these particular thoughts about how the detective-story genre was developing? Would Sir Bernard Spilsbury, a thorough forensic pathology professional, actually invite a detective novelist, however renowned, to visit crime scenes with him? This reader's disquiet found the use of real people for fictional entertainment, especially ones who lived relatively recently, a disturbing invasion of privacy.

Is that right? All of the novels considered above have something to offer as entertainment, but should the trend they represent be viewed with alarm? Maybe not if you assume an educated audience. Historical fiction involving real people implies an unwritten contract between writer and reader, hard to define but ideally clear in the minds of

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both. Obviously, the reader understands that the made-up dialogue was never spoken and some of the specific events and encounters never took place. But the reader has the right to expect that the hard facts of the historical person's life, the dates and places, the opinions and attitudes, the social and religious values, as far as possible the manner of speaking, are consistent with what is known about that person. When relatively little is known, as with Chaucer or Shakespeare, more can be invented than when much is known, as with Potter or Christie.

As cultural literacy declines, the everyday reader or viewer may have a harder and harder time making the needed distinctions between the real and the fanciful. Blurring the line in supposed nonfiction, as in Edmund Morris's semi-fictionalized Ronald Reagan biography, makes matters worse, as does the overly vague application of the useful neologism "docudrama," which should apply only to works that take their language from a printed record (a trial transcript, for example, or correspondence) but now often refers to any dramatic presentation ostensibly based on real events. So-called "reality" shows on television, the nonfiction equivalent of professional wrestling, may be passable entertainment if you know they are contrived but problematic if you think they are real.

True, this confusion is no new phenomenon. We have long heard of people writing advice to soap-opera characters or sending letters off to Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker Street. Do we have to put aside our pleasures of mixing fact and fiction because some people are too ignorant or uninformed to tell the difference? Mystery novelists are not going to stop writing about real-life detectives, and I don't intend to stop enjoying them at least selectively.

But the current climate calls for a greater measure of care. One practice that should be encouraged is to provide a foreword or afterword, as Collins always does, spelling out exactly what is real and what invented. This is especially helpful when arcane events that sound like the product of imagination turn out to have a basis in reality. ♦

Chills & Thrills

Michael Crichton saves us—from those who want to save us from global warming. **BY DEBRA J. SAUNDERS**

It's all so improbable. A stray group of unprepared people suddenly joined together to save the planet from catastrophe in a matter of days? A world of pre-September 11 airports, through which they can make hassle-free sprints from Iceland to Los Angeles to the Solomon Islands? A much-married philanthropist, a left-leaning actor with a disturbing resemblance to Martin Sheen, and all the other endlessly beautiful and smart people who invariably inhabit a Michael Crichton novel? I'm hooked instantly. Michael Crichton is, well, Michael Crichton. There's no one else like him, thank God, and the improbabilities combine—as they always do in his books—to make his latest, *State of Fear*, a fast, fun read.

HarperCollins

State of Fear
by Michael Crichton
HarperCollins, 603 pp., $27.95

Be forewarned: *State of Fear* is a novel about orthodox thinking on global warming, complete with footnotes on climate change. The book's dialogue doesn't exactly make for a fair fight: Crichton pits a knowledgeable scientist against uninformed and brainwashed amateurs, who can only question their opponents' motives, laud their own intentions (they may be wrong but they mean well), and repeat mindless environmental mantras.

So, for instance, a character named Ted Bradley—an actor who played the president on a television series—warns that global warming will result in crop failures, spreading deserts, diseases, species extinction, a rise in sea level, and extreme weather. But John Kenner, a scientist on leave from MIT, makes quick work of the hapless Bradley. "Actually," he dryly notes, "scientific studies do not support your claims. For example, crop failure—if anything, increased carbon dioxide *stimulates* plant growth. There is some evidence that this is happening. And the most recent satellite studies show the Sahara has shrunk since 1980.* As for new diseases—not true. The rate of emergence of new diseases has not changed since 1960." (The asterisk refers readers to a footnote that cites an article in the September 2002 *New Scientist*.)

For global warming skeptics, there is satisfaction in watching the book's heroes puncture environmentalism and let out the hot air that inflates the movement's true believers. The informative monologue is a perpetual Crichton trademark. Has anyone had a run like his? So many huge bestsellers, each a major movie, from *The Andromeda Strain* in 1969 and *The Great Train*

Debra J. Saunders writes a nationally syndicated column for the San Francisco Chronicle.

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Robbery in 1975, to *Jurassic Park* in 1990 and *The Lost World* in 1995. And in every one of them, long discussions of whatever has caught the author's eye. In *State of Fear*, we get not only global warming, but also the advantages of civilized societies over primitive cultures, alarmism in the mainstream media, and how the witless do-gooders who banned the pesticide DDT have been responsible for millions of malaria deaths in third-world countries.

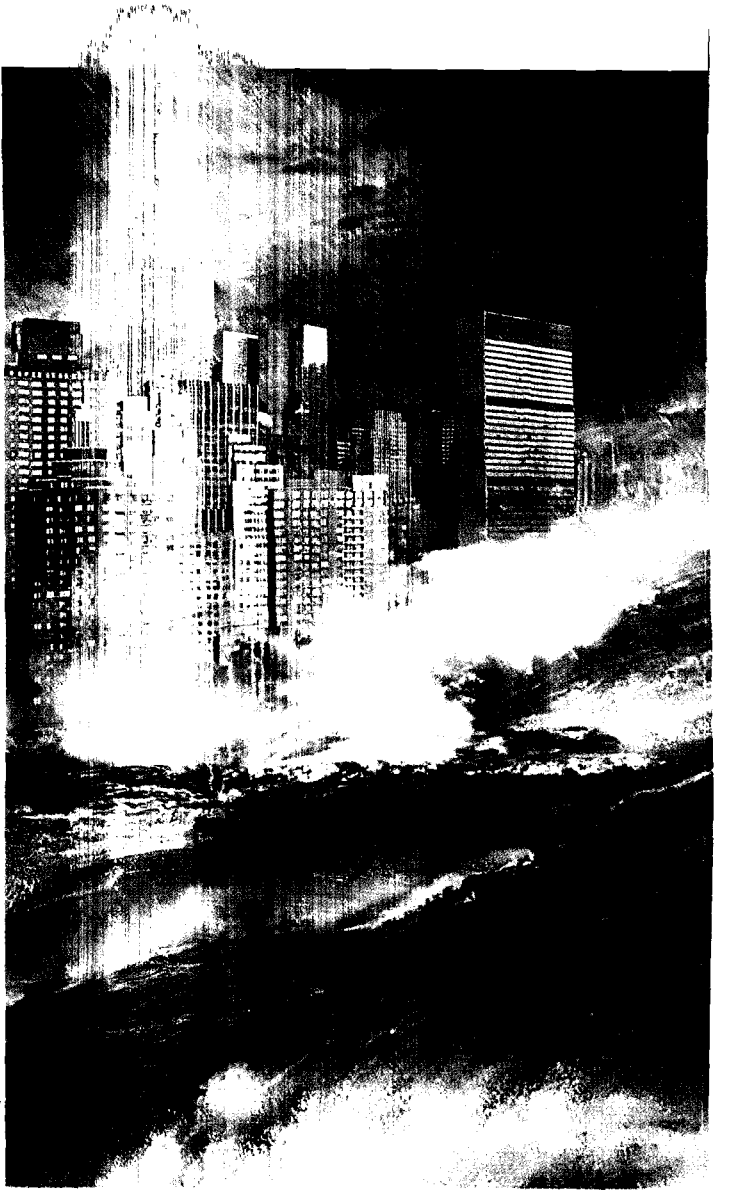
Much of his protagonist's argument can be found in a speech Crichton made last year at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, in which he took on "the disinformation age." Challenging the belief that this is "a secular society in which many people—the best people, the most enlightened people—do not believe in any religion," he argued that the religion to which they in fact give themselves is "environmentalism," a faith-based fact-lite creed. *State of Fear* is that 2002 speech in a novel.

In response to the book, as if to prove how right Crichton is, the Natural Resources Defense Council sent out a press release that warned media minions not to be fooled. Enviros are quite used to global-warming scare flicks, like *The Day After Tomorrow*. When the tables are turned on them, however, they feel compelled to warn "media and policymakers" not to "confuse science fiction with science."

In fact, according to the group, it is as wrong to question whether global warming is human-induced as it once was wrong for Galileo to believe the earth is not the center of the universe. "Journalists can help keep *State of Fear* from producing a state of confusion by keeping their focus on the real debate: How will we act to solve this problem?" the council scolded. Translation: You're not supposed to ask questions. Good people keep the faith.

When the Natural Resources Defense Council reverently cited "climate models" and scientists' "projections" of more warming, as if models and projections were fact, they were behaving just the way Crichton's fictionalized versions do. And Crichton's scientist Kenner takes great joy in referring to the predictions made by enviro darlings that didn't come true. Okay, so maybe it is a little unfair for *State of Fear* to pit an MIT scientist against a boozy actor or a rich Hollywood housewife who drives an SUV and flies in private planes (but atones by buying a Prius hybrid for the household help). But in a world that is off-kilter, only the heavy hand can provide balance.

The fastidious might take issue with Crichton's odd insistence on realism in science—in a novel to which the word "realism" doesn't exactly apply. But that's Crichton for you. *Jurassic Park* contained long monologues about the real-world dangers of biotechnology, in a story about scientists who clone a tyrannosaurus rex from the DNA found in the insides of a long-dead bug trapped in amber. *State of Fear* introduces fantastic methods for causing tidal waves, inducing flash floods, and breaking ice shelves. And for some reason, an aging millionaire philanthropist is tasked with a mission that would challenge a troop of well-armed Special Forces. The book often presents its characters in the style of an airport-bookstore bestseller: "Even by Los Angeles standards, Sarah Jones was an extremely beautiful woman. She was tall, with a honey-colored tan, shoulder length blond hair, blue eyes, perfect features, very white teeth. She was athletic in the casual way that California people were athletic, generally showing up for work in a jogging suit or short tennis skirt."



20th Century Fox

The global-warming disaster movie The Day After Tomorrow.

Well, so what? Crichton still somehow manages to keep you wondering about his characters. And while the people he invents are treated with a light touch, Crichton nonetheless manages to confer his ideas with heft. So he finds himself pushing science within the framework of science fiction and insisting on realism from a pedestal of fiction.

The Natural Resources Defense Council criticized Crichton for his "peculiar contrarian take on global warming." It shows you how establishmentarian the environmental lobby has become.

Forget the notion of hard-core scientists who dissect the real world in a relentless quest to get to the truth, no matter what it is. The group used the term "contrarian" as though it were a bad thing. ♦

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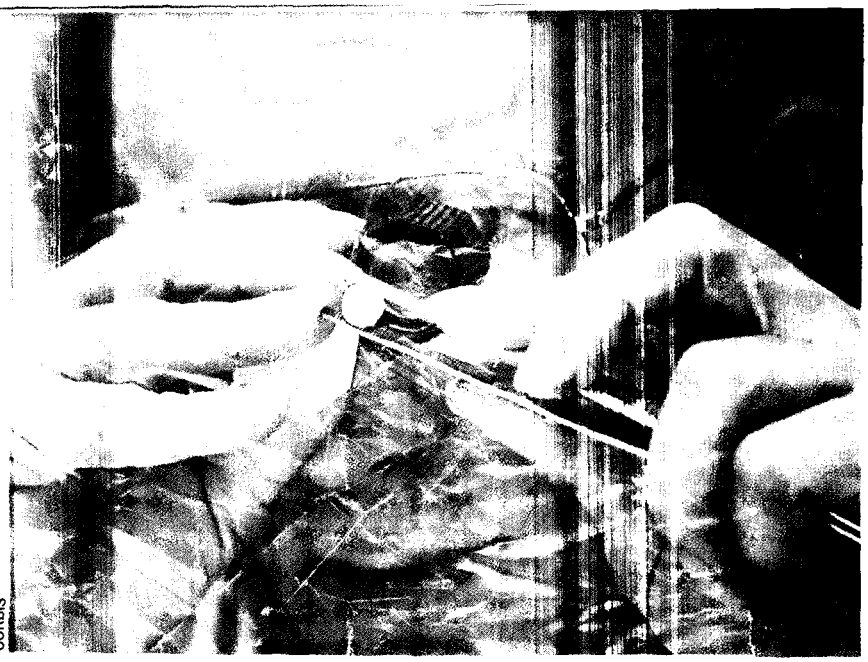

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Diamonds for Blood

How terrorism funds itself.

BY VANCE SERCHUK

West Africa, a region not usually uppermost in the minds of American foreign policymakers, is nonetheless responsible for two of our most intractable post-9/11 intelligence puzzles.

In these two very similar cases, Arab operatives in West African countries allegedly seek to exploit local smuggling operations to buy precious and tightly controlled natural commodities. The CIA investigates, but the veracity of the stories remains uncertain, and, consequently, the subject of protracted, acrimonious debate within the intelligence community.

Of these stories, one—Iraq's purported attempts to acquire uranium from Niger—is well known. The other—al Qaeda's purchase of conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia—is not. Thus it makes a well-deserving subject for a new book, namely *Blood From Stones* by veteran investigative journalist and former *Washington Post* West Africa bureau chief Douglas Farah.

Blood From Stones
The Secret Financial Network of Terror
by Douglas Farah
Broadway Books, 225 pp., $24.95

Farah first posited the connection between black market gems and radical Islam in the fall of 2001. *Blood From Stones* carefully lays out the evidence that senior al Qaeda operatives traveled to West Africa in the late 1990s and again in the summer of 2001 to buy diamonds from Sierra Leonean rebels, with the connivance of then-president Charles Taylor of Liberia.

Taylor, a thuggish kleptocrat under U.N. sanctions, was desperate for cash to fund proxy wars against his neighbors, while al Qaeda in turn was eager to launder tens of millions of dollars into commodities like diamonds, gold, tanzanite, and emeralds. "All are essentially parallel currencies," Farah explains, "easy to transport, smuggle, and convert."

Farah builds his case largely from field intelligence he gathered personally. His story certainly doesn't lack for color. In spare, deadpan prose, the book surveys a bizarre and often grotesque raft of characters, such as a hairdresser-turned-warlord known as "General Mosquito" (the legendarily effective killer is said to suck the life out of his enemies); a rebel army of orphaned child soldiers, notorious for hacking limbs off noncombatants; and a former bodyguard to Muammar Qaddafi, veteran of Hezbollah, and all-around soldier of fortune, who insists he is actually a used car salesman. By the end of this tour through the West African bush, the reader will be forgiven for finding, by contrast, the evil of al Qaeda's Islamic fundamentalism reassuring in its familiarity.

Sensational though Farah's charges are—he was evacuated from West Africa with his family in 2001 after U.S. and foreign governments discovered threats of "retribution" for his reporting—*Blood From Stones* raises as many questions as it answers. Farah calls the West African diamond trade "some of al Qaeda's most vital financial operations," but it remains unclear to what extent this emphasis on commodities is really commensurate with their importance in Osama bin Laden's budget. Both the 9/11 Commission and an independent task force recently organized by the Council on Foreign Relations, for example, concluded that the overwhelming bulk of al Qaeda's money comes from fundraising in the Gulf.

In fairness, Farah expands his analysis of terrorist financing well beyond Africa's diamond fields, diligently detailing al Qaeda's reliance on Islamic charities and underground financial networks like *hawala*, a trust-based system for transferring funds in the Muslim world. But as the book's title implies, the intellectual and emotional crux of this project lies in exposing the interstices between commodity trafficking and terrorism.

Although Farah's diamond thesis has thankfully not been politicized to the same degree as uranium smuggling

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in Niger, it has polarized the intelligence community all the same. The CIA has furiously denounced the argument ("a pile of horse—t," according to one Agency spokesman who spoke to Farah), while European intelligence agencies, the U.N. Special Court in Sierra Leone, and independent sleuthing by NGOs have unearthed further evidence to support it.

But regardless of whether an al Qaeda-diamond nexus is ever conclusively proved, *Blood From Stones* is still valuable for its broader revelations about where our intelligence capabilities are disturbingly lacking.

As Farah points out, "The CIA had lost more assets in West Africa than almost anywhere else in the world after the Cold War. Many stations around the continent, which had been used primarily as recruiting grounds for Soviet bloc agents, were closed or cut to the bone." Yet the 9/11 Commission found that West Africa is among the half-dozen places where, "if you were a terrorist leader today . . . you [would] locate your base." So it is clear that the conventional wisdom concerning the region's strategic irrelevance is both anachronistic and dangerous.

There are hopeful signs that the United States is beginning to redress its West Africa blind spot. Earlier this year, the Pentagon dispatched Special Forces and Marines to Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad to train local militaries in counterterrorism. Of particular concern to the American military are the ungoverned wastelands that stretch across the southern rim of the Sahara, which radical Islamist networks are believed to be using as a safe haven.

Much of the war on terrorism will require venturing deep into these collapsed corners of the Muslim world, far from where America's spies, soldiers, and diplomats are accustomed to working.

As our national security establishment adapts to confront the considerable challenge posed by such places, we can be grateful to intrepid explorers like Douglas Farah who have already made the journey—and have returned to tell us about it. ♦

Southern Cross

Freaks and other Christians in Flannery O'Connor's stories. BY MARIA ANDRACA CARANO

The waspish grandfather of Hazel Motes, an old evangelical preacher "with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger," broadcasts to listeners willing and unwilling the startling news that to redeem a single "stone soul," Jesus was willing to die "ten million deaths."

That preacher's creator was Flannery O'Connor, the author from Milledgeville, Georgia, who died in 1964 at age thirty-nine—an incalculable loss to American literature. Who in the forty years since has been willing to aim fiction at the deepest metaphysical foundations of human existence? Who, for that matter, still believes fiction *can* aim at metaphysical foundations? O'Connor disdained to write about anything less crucial, less important than such subjects as the presence of Christ revealed in history and present in the sacraments—all through the life and death, love and hate, grandeur and pettiness of American southerners in all their peculiarity.

Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South
by Ralph C. Wood
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 208 pp., $22

Perhaps that's why O'Connor has not faded away but remains a perpetual puzzle for contemporary readers of literature. The highbrow world since the early 1960s has overwhelmingly rejected the possibility of literature driven by the religious faith they believe entirely repressive and destructive. And yet, there stands Flannery O'Connor in their way: a stumbling block, an unavoidable contradiction.

Last year, in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, Paul Elie outlined Flannery O'Connor's life and works in the context of her pilgrimage of faith among such influential Catholic contemporaries as Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Walker Percy.

This year, in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, Baylor University professor Ralph C. Wood examines O'Connor's writings both to reveal that her southern background illuminated her unique vision and to expose to present-day Christians her cautionary admonitions against a flaccid practical atheism.

Not a traditional biography, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* is a collection of essays aligning Flannery O'Connor's work with the fundamentalist Protestant Christians of the South and explaining the cultural, social, and political dynamic that formed the catapult for her writing.

O'Connor's fiction is filled with rustics, freaks, and prophets, the likes of which—Wood insists—really did populate the deep South she knew. What O'Connor saw is that these strange characters were seeking the truth behind eternity, reckless of the personal cost. As she once declared, "It seems to me . . . that all good stories are about conversion, about a character's changing."

Wood focuses on two major themes to connect O'Connor's literature to southern fundamentalist Protestantism. First, he examines the decline of traditional religious belief in and fear of an omnipotent Lord in favor of what he calls today's "civil religion," which dominates American culture save for that pocket of traditionalist believers who come from the South. Second, he scrutinizes O'Connor's application of southern speech and manners to create a world in which the themes she found worthy, indeed compelling, could be developed.

Maria Andraca Carano lives in Houston with her husband and three daughters.

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Flannery O'Connor stands before her portrait.

Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South examines the death of true atheism and the concomitant rise of practical atheism, typified by the character of Mrs. May in the story "Greenleaf," who had "a large respect for religion, though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true." O'Connor respected atheists such as H.L. Mencken, because they addressed the issue of God seriously enough to argue against His existence. She would affirm that she was "a Catholic not like someone else would be a Baptist or a Methodist but like someone else would be an atheist." She despised a culture espousing a "civil religion" whose commandments mandate that all religious beliefs have equal weight and that spiritual values derive from democratic principles. Or, as her character Hazel Motes sums up the American gospel: "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified by Jesus."

As befits a professor at one of the nation's premier Baptist universities, Ralph Wood looks in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* to align the Catholic O'Connor with the evangelical impulse—in other words, to use her southernness to claim her for the English department of Baylor rather than the English department of Notre Dame.

Is this possible? Well, maybe. As O'Connor wrote, "It is an embarrassment to our fundamentalist neighbors to realize that they are doctrinally nearer to their traditional enemy, the Church of Rome, than they are to modern Protestantism." Indeed, she added, "the Catholic novelist in the South will see many distorted images of Christ, but he will certainly feel that a distorted image of Christ is better than no image at all. I think he will feel a good deal more kinship with backwoods prophets and shouting fundamentalists than he will with those politer elements for whom the supernatural is an embarrassment and for whom religion has become a department of sociology or culture or personality development."

O'Connor believed that the American South constituted a region "haunted" by Christ—and thus, in however distorted a way, was able to avoid the nihilism of the modern age. If the disintegration of morals and religious beliefs into the chaos of nihilism constituted "the very air that we breathe," still, devotion to a system of manners might yield something beyond mere social convention or psychological delusions. Southern manners formed an important buttress for religious values, and so Flannery O'Connor praised the elaborate sense of manners prevalent in southern culture as being "the next best thing to Christian charity."

And yet, she knew the limits of manners as well. The narrow-minded cynics in her stories typically imagine they are exempt from southern manners, because they fail to live Christian beliefs. Meanwhile, her prophets and freaks fail to be mannerly because the religious quest at stake must be revealed in violent action.

This much is true of Wood's goal in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*: O'Connor's characters could not be other than Southern fundamentalists. They speak with a simplicity of language and boldness of imagery retained only in the rural areas of the South. This vivid simplicity shines in the language of O'Connor's preachers. In "The River," Bevel Summers exhorts his listeners to baptism: "Listen to what I got to say, you people! There ain't but one River and that's the River of Life, made out of Jesus' blood." In *The Violent Bear It Away*, Lucette Carmody intones, "Divine love cuts like the cold wind and the will of God is plain as the winter"—and shouts "The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean, burns man and child, man and child the same, you people!"

The southerner, O'Connor once quipped, greatly feared that he might have been formed in the image and likeness of God. She wanted her work to sound "like the Old Testament would sound if it were being written today." Laconically noting that "subject matter has more to do with region than religion, at least in fiction," she thought that universalism—a vision of the metaphysical roots of reality—was possible only by taking advantage of a narrow parochialism: Her characters had to travel their salvation journey within the Deep South. Her prophets, like the reluctant Francis Marion Tarwater, may run from "the stink of the Cross," but the Cross will not let them go.

Wood rightly notes the link between Flannery O'Connor's literary freaks and the freakishness of southern fundamentalism. Protestant theologians and atheists alike have found it difficult to "grant cultural standing to fundamentalism," belittling Southern fundamentalists as "primitive agriculturalists . . . inclined to magic." O'Connor found this intense adherence to traditional beliefs a sincere calling and a just ordering of priorities.

And yet, while it is undeniable that O'Connor empathized with southern fundamentalists in her stories, she nonetheless saw them as potential or unconscious Catholics—and not herself as a secret fundamentalist. Southern Protestantism is a religious place, she wrote, whose "outward forms are farthest from the Catholic and most revealing of a need that only the [Catholic] Church can fill." Her very *need* to write derived from her Catholicism. Wood mentions O'Connor's observance of traditional Catholic religious practices, including daily Mass and prayers. He also characterizes part of her message as "holding hard to the sacraments that evangelical Protestants are prone to neglect."

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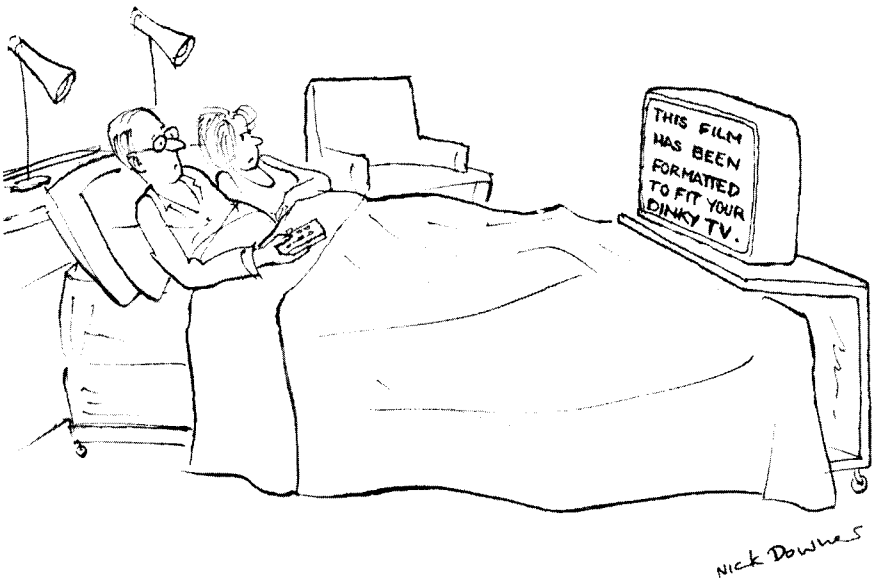
The Standard Reader



Books in Brief

***Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* by Cokie Roberts (William Morrow, 359 pp., $24.95).** "I've decided not to dress a whole head of cow, but [Martha Washington's] Harty Choke Pie is delicious," writes Cokie Roberts in the introduction to her strange little book about the wives and mothers of the Founding Fathers. Women, Roberts somewhat breathlessly reports, played important roles in the birth of America. They spun and sewed. They cooked a lot. They managed slaves, chose paint colors, and fretted to each other in the letters that provide much of the source material for the book—all while periodically giving more literal births than that of a nation.

Their husbands weren't the only ones with violent urges during the Revolution. When Ben Franklin failed to offer helpful decorating suggestions, Roberts suggests, his wife "Deborah was probably ready to tack the gilt [wallpaper border] around his head." When the boorish Franklin bought a practical spinning wheel for his sister's wedding, Roberts writes that she probably "wanted to kill him." John Adams warned Abigail to "fly to the woods with our children" if the situation with the British got dangerous—and "she must have wanted to throttle him," Roberts observes.

Perhaps *Founding Mothers* isn't meant to be much more than an echo of Abigail Adams's famous plea to her husband to "remember the ladies." Cokie Roberts's efforts may not do much for her subjects' prominence in history books, but at least we now know that Martha made a mean crab soup.

—Katherine Mangu-Ward

But contrast the passage where Paul Elie in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* stresses O'Connor's treatment of the Eucharist ("the doctrine of the Body of Christ explained the pain in her bones") with Wood's focus instead on her dramatic depictions of the sacrament of baptism. Baptism represents a political proclamation of allegiance with Christ. It also constitutes a crucial sacrament for Protestants. For Catholics, however, baptism is a sacrament of initiation that is fulfilled in the Eucharist.

Indeed, O'Connor wrote, "the Eucharist is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable." Her admiration for fundamentalism was based in part on her pleasure "with the amount of Catholicism that fundamentalist Protestants have been able to retain."

One place that the religious reading in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* is especially helpful, however, is in explicating the violence of O'Connor's stories. ("While a lot of folks get killed in [my] work," she once explained, "nobody gets hurt.") Wood argues that the characters' earthly physical sufferings, which include deaths by drowning, gunshot, and goring, lead to spiritual happy endings, because the characters experience the revelation of Divine love. As she noted to her cloistered correspondents, the monks and nuns with whom she kept in contact, a Catholic joins the convent and is "heard from no more," whereas a Protestant believer enjoys no such haven and thus "must go about in the world, getting into all sorts of trouble and drawing the wrath of people who don't believe anything much at all down on [his] head." The fierce truths voiced by O'Connor's fundamentalists could hardly be spoken by a typical Catholic mystic.

For O'Connor, the violence acted out in her stories had a redemptive purpose; violence was required to make the religious point: "For the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures." Who, in the forty years since her death, has used fiction to shout as loudly as she dared? ♦

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BEYOND 100

The Fringes of Fame: Also-Rans of 2028

WILLIE SHOEMAKER IV

"It's not steroids, it's stick-to-it-iveness," the Las Vegas Yankees rightfielder, 26, crowed when he broke Barry Bonds's career home run record last May, in just his fourth year in the major leagues. It was an off-year for Shoemaker, but he did manage to hit 186 home runs while leading the Yankees to their first World Series since 2000, when the franchise was still located in New York. After winning the Preakness as a 91-pound jockey in 2023, Shoemaker decided to pursue baseball, which he calls "my first love." He attributes his flexibility to a rigorous weight training program. But rumors persist that

ROTO-REUTERS INTERNATIONAL

Willie Shoemaker IV

MADONNA KERIK

You may not have heard of her, but the gray-haired set will remember this well-known singer of "rock" music—or, as it is known to the younger crowd, "crap"—in the 1980s and 1990s. From the assisted-living facility where she resides outside of Los Angeles, the 70-year-old Madonna, still often called by her married name, has made herself the impresario of an exciting project: the first all-clone rock band. Her new husband, George Bush Johnson, 16, leads the quartet in his free hours after high school. "You have a better idea of your bandmates' sense of rhythm," says Johnson, "if you share the same essential genetic struc-

GATES/GETTY/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Madonna Kerik

UPI/BBC/SONY/SPRINT/TEXACO PHOTOS

Donald Rumsfeld

DONALD RUMSFELD

"Iraq is looking up!" he said in late November. Chances of pacifying the American protectorate, the embattled defense secretary said, look better than they have since 2019. The peripatetic Sec. Rumsfeld, 96, has visited all 57 states in the past 18 months, from British Columbia to Cuba, selling his message to all who will listen. On a recent visit to Paris, he issued a stern warning to French president Abdullah Abdullah Abdul about keeping religion out of the European constitution before jetting back to Washington—or rather to Camp David—where he joined the president and his husband for a afternoon game of

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Cutting-Edge Commentary on K–12 Education

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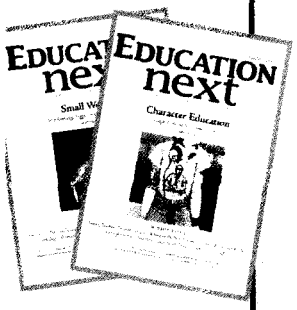

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In the Winter 2005 Issue

A Forum on Paying Teachers Properly

For more than a century, public education has worked with a single salary schedule that compensates teachers for college credits, education degrees, and years of experience—but not for their effectiveness in the classroom.

Research shows that the degrees, courses, and experience that teachers have, beyond the first few years of teaching, are unrelated to how much their students achieve. The uniform salary schedule does not take into account that teachers work in schools offering different levels of nonmonetary benefits, such as a safe environment and students with different levels of preparation and home support. Nor does it allow for extra pay for those in hard-to-staff fields, such as math and science. But any pay-for-performance plan in K–12 education will succeed only if teachers buy into it from the start, if it is fair, and if it is embedded in a systemic reform that encourages teachers to become better at their craft.

—Lewis Solmon

The Moral Imperative

Are schools effective that take character education reform seriously?

Character education has legs. It is a reform so thoroughly in the American grain, not to mention so various and adaptable, that it cannot be dismissed as just another shiny and insubstantial bubble. Moreover, the wish for schools to somehow address the sense of drift and anomie in the larger culture is not likely to abate. So the issue is not whether we will have character education, but instead, what kind we will have and what relationship it will bear to the ongoing campaign to improve children's academic skills.

—James Traub

Where Have All the Dollars Gone?

Reading, Pennsylvania, became the first school district in the nation to sue a state education department over the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Reading's lawsuit might just prove that NCLB is doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing: exposing struggling districts to standards of excellence that they had never even imagined. And what was first considered to be the perfect district to illuminate NCLB's defects has turned out to be a shining example of why NCLB is needed.

—Brad Bumsted

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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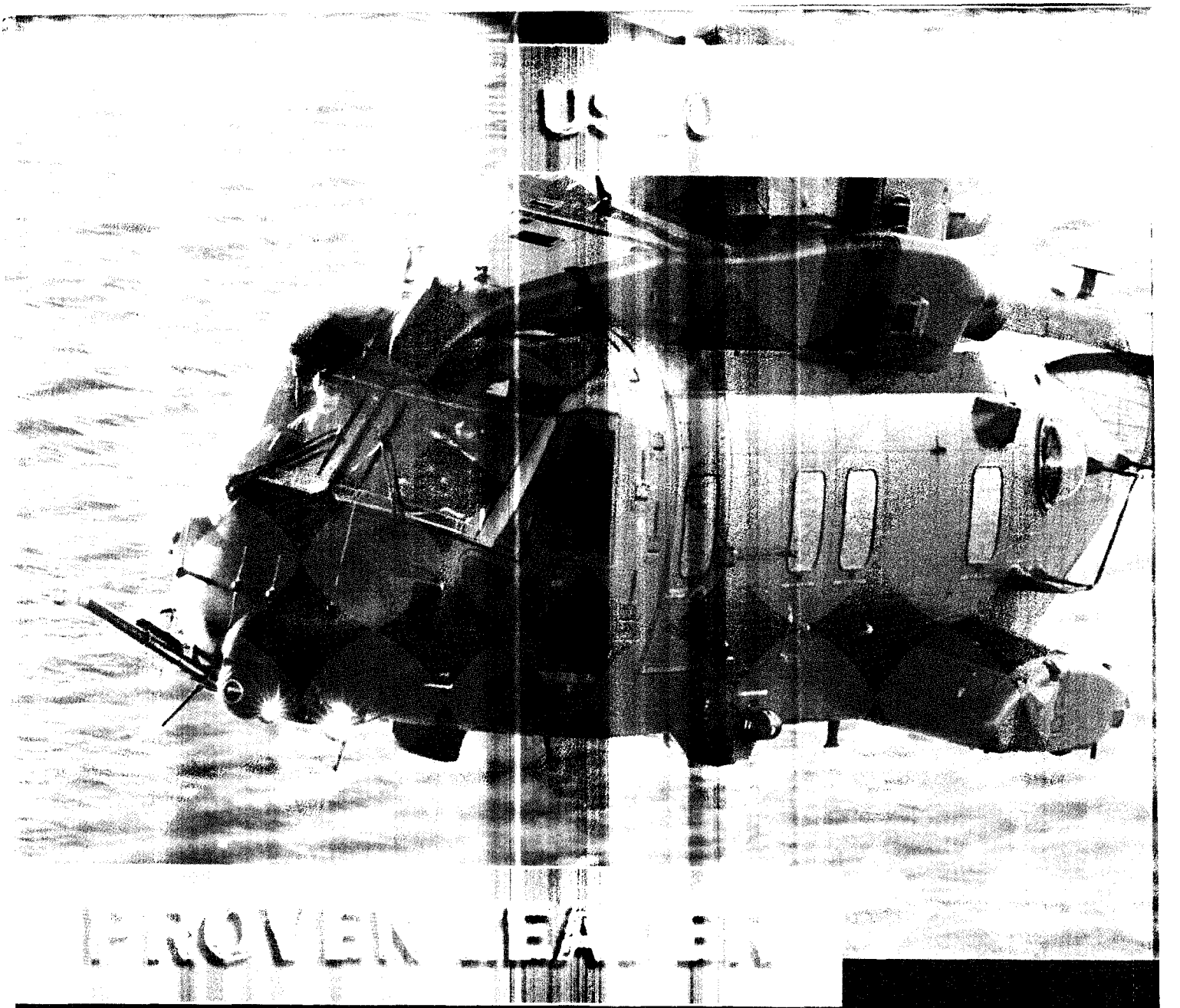

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